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THEN GILDED DUST

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First Edition

TO MY WIFE

“ . . . Then gilded dust
is all your yellow gold . . . ”

From the poems of Ssu-K'ung Tu
A.D. 834-908

THEN GILDED DUST

CHAPTER ONE

THEY watched the big birds in the sky, like great vultures circling over the Chinese lines in Hongkew.

Slim fingers of yellow from the Chinese searchlights stabbed into the darkness. Now and then one of the planes would sail into the light and there would be a sound like the popping of firecrackers as the Chinese guns blazed away from below. But there was no effective fire and the planes circled lazily, unloading their racks, and the roar of the great bombs exploding shook the night.

Borisov cursed as he watched, but Alan Hunter, standing motionless beside the huge Russian, was silent. As the bombs crashed he could feel the death that rained down, but he felt it in a strangely detached way.

The two stood there for a long time watching and after the planes had gone they saw the flames from the fires in Hongkew licking the sky.

At first there was a noise from the burning suburb like the snapping of twigs but later the sound grew into a horrible roar as the flames leaped and danced.

Finally Alan turned away and looked at Borisov. In the queer bright light he could see the giant Russian's face working with fury. The muscles in his cheeks kept contracting and his angry face was not a pleasant thing to see.

Alan put his hand on Borisov's shoulder and said, "Come on."

They turned their backs to the fire and made their way through the swarms of fear-crazed Chinese in the street. Men, women and children were running in circles, screaming shrilly. Big bearded Sikh policemen fought to keep order, cracking heads with their swinging batons. Now and then a man would go down into the mob, battered and bleeding, shrieking "*Ai ya!*" It made a hideous sound in the night.

Borisov said, "Bah! I have had enough of this."

Alan smiled at him faintly. "Can't you take it?"

The Russian was shouldering his way through the mob. He led the way onto the Bund. Just ahead the lights of the Astor House Hotel showed dimly through the fog and the gray smoke of battle. Borisov called back over his shoulder, "Come, we will get a drink here."

They went into the Astor House bar and sat down. The Russian took off his beret and rubbed his hands

nervously over his short-cropped black hair. He had a massive rugged face with heavy dark brows and a hooked nose, and there was an owlish expression in his eyes as he sprawled in his chair. Like Alan, he wore khaki trousers and shirt and thick army boots, but over his shirt Borisov had a faded blue sweater and the veins of his throat stood out where they showed above the sweater's worn rounded neck. A long jagged scar ran along his right cheek and stood out white against his dark face.

"Vodka!" he shouted. When a waiter brought it Borisov drank it in fiery gulps. Then he looked at Alan. "Bah! I do not like this killing here."

"That's war," Alan said. But his words were lost because there was so much noise from the shelling outside. "That's war, I say," he shouted over the table.

"Bah!" the Russian said again. "Yes, it is war, but it is not good war. It is stupid war. If Chiang had fought the way I tried to show him instead of listening to his stupid Germans this did not need to happen to Shanghai."

"Well, your conscience is clear," Alan said.

"What?" Borisov scowled at the deafening uproar.

Alan shook his head indifferently, then winced as an explosion came close.

It was the Third Japanese Battlefleet, he knew, that kept pumping shells into the city. Another burst landed near, as if they'd decided to forget the International Settlement's neutrality and aim at the Astor House bar. A sort of suppressed animal sound went up from the drinkers. There were a lot of Americans in the bar and some Englishmen and everybody was drinking because there wasn't anything else to do until the *President Jefferson* got back from Manila. Most of the Americans were planning to leave on the *Jefferson*, hoping they would still be alive when the ship docked in the morning.

"Drink!" Borisov said.

Alan drank and tried not to think about the near misses outside. He was a big fellow with the build of a swimmer, broad-shouldered, slim-waisted, with long legs and powerful arms. He had a lean boyish face and dark hair cropped, like Borisov's, close to his head. His dark eyes squinted slightly from looking into the sun and the squint gave him a cynical look. His nose was prominent above a strong cleft chin and he had a sensitive mouth, well shaped and full-lipped, but like his eyes, the lines of his mouth had hardened. A neglected dark stubble of beard gave a bluish cast to his bronzed young face in the dim light.

He sat drinking and looking at Borisov, eying the other's nervous movements with a rather superior but good-humored tolerance. He was glad he didn't let the war get under his skin the way Borisov did. Both of them made a business of war, but the Russian let it become too personal a business. He took it too hard when the country that his government had sent him to help wouldn't let him jump in and run things his own way. That was no good. If it wasn't your own fight why get all steamed up over it? It wasn't Borisov's fault that the Chinese had taken on a German general instead. Borisov was still getting paid by Russia just the same. He didn't even have to worry about China going under. He'd go back to Russia and still have a job as a general. Alan thought sourly, It's different for me. If China goes under I'll be out of a job and a long way from home.

He looked away from Borisov. A few tables away a blonde girl was drinking alone. There was a wonderful play of expression on her face as she listened to the roar of the big guns on the Whangpoo and the bursting of the shells, and Alan found it pleasant looking at her. He had met her before in the bar but all he knew about her was that her name was Christine and that she was an American too. She was tall, rather

slender, with deep-set gray eyes and soft golden hair that she combed back and coiled in a knot low on her neck. She sat quietly staring at the half-empty glass that she kept twisting and turning between the palms of her hands and at times, Alan thought, she looked like a bewildered child playing at being grown up.

Some of the women in the bar were hysterical, but Christine was calm in a strained sort of way, and Alan couldn't help admiring her courage. He wondered who she was and what she was doing in Shanghai alone with the war going on.

She saw him and smiled uncertainly. He got up and went to her table.

"Hello," he shouted, leaning down to her.

"Hello," her lips formed.

Alan shouted again into her ear. "How's the war treating you?"

"I'm scared." He felt her lips accidentally touch his ear.

He sat down and motioned for a drink like hers, and they stopped trying to talk. She was a little drunk, Alan saw, but so was everyone else in the bar. The waiter brought his drink and Christine drank with him. She shuddered again as a shell fell in the street outside the hotel. Alan leaned across the table and

shouted, "This will be over for you tomorrow. You'll be out of Shanghai."

She shook her head. "I'm not leaving tomorrow."

Alan looked his surprise. He wondered why she wasn't leaving on the *Jefferson* with the others. But it was no use asking now.

They didn't talk any more.

A pockmarked yellow boy came into the bar, bowing and scared, and saw Alan. He hurried to their table and said, "General Liang ask Mr. Hunter come quick. Most urgent."

Alan gave him a coin and got up. "I've got to go," he told Christine loudly.

She put her hand toward him and drew it back. "Oh, why?"

"My boss wants me."

"Who is your boss?"

Alan pretended he hadn't heard. But he sat down on the edge of his chair, looking at her. There was something childlike about her body under her heather sweater. Her waist was unbelievably small and her shoulders and arms were delicate, almost fragile, but her breasts, rounded and full, were those of a woman. There was a strange fascination about the soft lines of her face and the incongruous determined set of her

mouth. She was pale and her lipstick made a bright splash of color against her small round face.

"Please don't go," she said.

Alan roused himself. "I've got to. But don't leave. I'll be back."

He wheeled and strode to Borisov. The Russian was drunk, with his head down on the table. Alan left him there and without looking around went out to the street.

The shelling was heavier now. The big Japanese guns were pouring everything they had into the Chinese lines on the water front. From far back in Chapei the Chinese artillery answered. The deep-throated roar of the guns was deafening.

Off to the right in Hongkew there was the steady rattle of machine-gun fire. Across the river Pootung was aflame. The fires lighted the sky and helped the Japanese searchlights pick out targets for the guns of the warships.

The yellow boy was running ahead, dodging into doorways when the searchlights bathed him in light. There were great, gaping holes in the Bund where shells had fallen and Alan stumbled several times in the darkness. Once he fell across the body of a sentry sprawled in the street. A searchlight turned on them

and Alan saw that the man's head had been blasted away. He felt an impersonal sort of nausea as he got up and hurried after the running yellow boy.

There was furious fighting near the Garden Bridge. The two had to wriggle across the bridge on their bellies. On the other side they got up and ran toward the Chinese lines in the dark. The boy waved and shouted to a sentry so that they would not be shot. They reached the Chinese line and walked behind sandbags. It was a long ragged line. There were many dead.

The General's messenger led Alan to a shattered warehouse which the Chinese were using as headquarters. Through a window he could see General Liang in the light of an oil lamp.

The Chinese was leaning over an improvised desk studying a roughly drawn map. He looked very young in the dim light. Except for the mustache that drooped at the corners of his mouth he might have been a cadet bent over his desk at the great military academy at Whampoa.

Liang rose when he saw Alan, came forward and put out his hand. He had lost the third and fourth fingers of his right hand in the 1932 fighting at Shanghai, and the stumps were livid.

"I am glad you have come," he said in crisp precise English.

There was no passion in the smooth yellow face . . . only calm purpose.

"You can be of real service," Liang said, leading the way into the inner room of the warehouse. "If you do not mind danger." He smiled and Alan smiled his slow smile back. In five years they had been through much danger together.

An ancient white priest rose from a chair as they entered the room.

"This is Father François," said Liang. "Father François, this young man is my personal pilot, Alan Hunter."

The priest took Alan's hand warmly. "You are surprised to find a priest here?" he asked, smiling. He had a thin quavering voice and spoke with a French accent. He said, "I have delivered a lecture to General Liang."

In the faint light his eyes twinkled. He had kindly brown eyes, a thin line of a mouth, thinning gray hair and a straggly white beard. He wore an old loose-fitting black robe and a black beret bearing the insignia of the Jesuit order. He was frail-looking, yet he held himself stiffly erect as he stood there in the

wavering light. There was an oddly compelling power about his personality, Alan thought, that somehow made itself known in his slightest gesture. Alan felt curiously drawn to him.

"No, Father," he answered the old man's question. "After your work in Nantao nothing you did would surprise me."

Father Francois laughed softly. He had created a safety zone for noncombatants in the Nantao section of Shanghai. More than two hundred thousand were now quartered in that area, protected. The old priest had obtained from the Japanese a promise to by-pass the zone.

He waved his hand now toward the desk. "There is a decision to be made."

General Liang motioned Alan to a chair beside his own. The Chinese bent over the map, pointing with the forefinger of his shattered hand.

"The Japanese are here," he said, indicating a point on the map, "and here. They are closing in fast." He sat back and looked at Alan through eyes narrowed to slits. A smile played at the corners of his mouth. "We have reinforcements coming from the west. Even without them we could exact a dear price for Shanghai. But I have a better plan."

He tugged at his mustache with his mutilated hand as he talked.

"We will appear to retreat. The Japanese are confident. They will not suspect. They will drive forward and we will swing out and around their lines to the rear. We will leave five hundred men here. They will not permit the enemy to advance too swiftly. Then when it is too late the Japanese will find themselves trapped. We will attack from the rear and Chiang can attack from the west and drive them back into our guns."

Liang raised his two hands and brought them together slowly until they met, and then ground the palms together graphically.

Alan asked, "Where do I come in?"

"You are to go west and tell Chiang of my plan. He must hurry."

Alan looked down at the map and said nothing. It was a dangerous plan, he knew, for if it didn't work it would leave Liang in the trap.

He stood up and walked to the door and gazed out at the flames in the sky. "Chiang will feel he should have been consulted before."

"It is impossible now to communicate directly with Chiang." There was a trace of impatience in the

general's voice. "All orders are given by Baron von Frisch. He has forbidden me to attempt this maneuver. I do not have the highest regard for his military judgment."

Alan smiled grimly. He thought of the thousands already dead in the futile defense of Shanghai. "Nor do I," he said.

The old priest was silent. Alan looked back over his shoulder at him.

"How about you, Father François?" he asked. "What do you think of this plan?"

"I am not a strategist," the Jesuit said. "I know nothing of war." For a moment he stroked his shaggy white beard. "I only know that there are times when it is wise to retreat. It is a lesson we have learned in my country. It does not imply a lack of courage. This plan is too dangerous. We cannot afford to lose leaders like Liang."

Alan nodded. "That's what I was thinking."

Liang smiled. "I do not know how to retreat." He got up and went to stand beside Alan. "I want you to understand," he said quietly, "that I have decided upon this plan. If Chiang does not help I will attempt it alone."

Alan glanced quickly at him. The Chinese was no

longer smiling and it was plain from the set of his jaw that it would be useless to try to dissuade him.

"What if you fail?" Alan demanded.

Liang spread his hands. "*Chung kuo wan sui*. China will live for ten thousand years."

For a time they were silent. Then Alan said, "I'll go."

Liang touched him with his injured hand. "That is good."

They sat down and Liang gave hurried instructions. "You will find a car in Tazang. My orderly will go with you that far. From there you will go on alone. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Alan said.

"Chiang will listen to you. You must make him listen. I knew that he would not listen to General Borisov. Borisov does not like the Germans here and there would only be trouble. Chiang has faith in the Germans. If he had listened to Borisov there would not have been this killing at Shanghai. But that is past now."

Father François stood up and the three men walked to the door.

"It will not be easy," Liang said, "to get through to Chiang. The planes are constantly over the road. They

are making it difficult for anything to move over it.”

“I’ll get through,” Alan said.

They shook hands and Alan left with the orderly. He looked back and saw Liang and the priest still standing in the doorway, outlined in the pale light. He waved to them and Father François called, “God go with you!”

CHAPTER TWO

THE Chinese were already leaving their positions. Alan saw long shadowy lines of them moving off silently into the darkness.

There were machine-gun nests all along the line and the gunners kept up a steady fire. The gunners were not to retreat, Alan knew. They were to hold off the enemy as long as they could. Tomorrow the big Japanese guns would blast them out of their lines. They were not afraid to die. Alan could see that by their faces which showed in the flashes of fire.

All along the evacuated lines the Chinese were setting up sticks and bracing steel helmets against them. The sticks were planted firmly and it would take a direct hit to dislodge them. It was an age-old trick but it populated the lines with skeleton troops and it had worked at Peiping.

Alan hurried along with Liang's orderly. At the end of the line they bent low and ran in the darkness toward the Garden Bridge.

The Japanese searchlights still played in the sky but the firing was not so heavy as it had been. The

Bund was deserted. Only the bodies of the dead still lay where they had fallen. Waves of fog rolled in off the Whangpoo, making for them an eerie sort of shroud.

In front of the Astor House bar Alan suddenly remembered Christine. Until this moment he had forgotten that he had asked her to wait for him, but he realized now that he had been thinking of her even while he was talking to Liang. The realization surprised him and he felt mild self-contempt. He wasn't in the habit of thinking of girls while on business.

He started to pass the building, but halted. "Wait a minute," he told the boy in Chinese.

He went in, entering the bar just as a shell landed close to the building's rear, shaking the walls. Christine sprang up and ran to him. Her eyes looked wild now. The lipstick was licked off her lips.

"I can't stand it here," she said. "Take me somewhere else."

Alan touched her arm. "I can't. I'm leaving Shanghai."

"Then take me!"

"Why don't you go to Manila?" he said. "Go back on the *Jefferson* tomorrow."

Her lips were quivering. "No. I'm staying in China."

"What in hell for?"

Her eyes glanced away. Then her hand clutched his arm. "Take me where you're going tonight."

He looked at her quivering bitten mouth and felt the blood rise in his temples and turn his face hot. He shook off her hand and wheeled toward the door. "You stay under cover. Good-by."

"Alan! No! Alan!"

She ran after him and caught him, swaying against him. Her breast crushed against his arm. Another blast struck nearby and she sobbed. "I'm going with you. You've got to take me. I'll—I'll do whatever you say."

Alan felt his heart beating. "All right," he said roughly. "Come on."

Outside Liang's orderly was waiting. Together the three walked along the Bund without talking. They left the Bund and the orderly led the way. They kept walking steadily in the darkness. The guns kept booming but Christine was calm now. She stumbled in a jagged hole where a shell had exploded and then took Alan's arm. The grip of her fingers drove his heart faster again.

"What made you start to crack up back there?" he asked.

She turned her head away. "I don't know."

"Haven't you any friends that you could have sat with?"

She didn't answer him. . . . Finally she said in a small voice, "It was just the sitting. If I'm on the move I'm all right."

"Even outdoors where the shells are?"

"They can come indoors."

"It's a little harder for them."

She gave a faint laugh. "I do feel better now," she said. "It's you. You've given me courage."

"You already had it."

She said faintly, "Whisky courage."

They stumbled on without talking, clinging together. "Who was your huge friend in the bar?" Christine asked then.

"That was Borisov. General Borisov. You've heard of him?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, he's probably the best of the Russian generals and he came here to help the Chinese but so far they haven't given him a chance to do any fighting. He worries about it. It makes him unhappy."

"He seemed unhappy. He was very drunk when he left the bar."

Alan laughed. "That's Borisov. When he can't fight he's unhappy and when he's unhappy he drinks. He spends his life drinking or fighting."

"Why won't they let him fight now?"

"There're too many Germans helping. The Germans are running this war. Borisov doesn't like 'em. When the war started Russia sent him to offer his services to Chiang. Chiang took him on, but he already had a German staff helping him to run the show. Borisov decided he was getting the brush-off and told Chiang what he thought and he and Chiang had a row. So since then he's just stayed sitting around waiting. Waiting for the Germans to get thrown out so he'll get his chance."

He saw her watching him closely. "It's a damned shame," he said, "because Borisov really is a brilliant tactician. He could do a better job than the Germans are doing. But he's a damned fool for taking it so hard just because Chiang doesn't give him his chance."

She looked at him curiously. "Why?" she asked.

The touch of her breast against his arm as they walked was distracting. "I told you why."

"No, I mean why do you think him a fool for minding that he doesn't get a chance to fight?"

A shell burst up ahead of them. Alan looked down at her, his mouth gone hard. "It isn't his war."

Small figures ran in the light of new fires. Christine watched them. "You mean it's only China's war?"

"Well, isn't it?"

She was silent for a few moments. "I think it's more than that."

"That's rot and you know it."

"No—I don't know."

They walked silently until she asked, "Does Borisov mind not fighting just because he likes to fight? Or——" She didn't finish.

"I told you he likes to fight," Alan said.

Abruptly she looked up at him. "Are you a soldier too?"

"I'm a flier."

"With the Chinese?"

"I'm with Liang."

"Liang! The general defending Shanghai?"

"Yes. Technically I'm his personal pilot. I flew for him before the war started. Then when he got into it I went in with him and did some combat flying for a while. It's fun! I've studied it for years. But it didn't last long here. Those crates they gave us wouldn't fly, let alone fight. The Japs busted 'em up in a hurry.

Now they've got the air to themselves. So I've been waiting, like Borisov. We got to be friends, waiting together."

Christine said, "Oh!" Then she asked, "How did you happen to come to China?"

"I came in the gold rush. A lot of us came out here because there was supposed to be easy money in China for fliers. There was some, before this damn war."

They were getting closer to the mess the shell had made up ahead, but he could feel Christine looking at him intensely.

"Does money mean so much to you?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"It buys things."

He could feel her staring at him and then felt her breast move faster against his arm. He made a movement so instinctive that his mind hardly directed it.

"Don't!" She jerked away, letting go of his arm. She walked beside him and in the light from the fires ahead he could see her breasts still heaving rapidly.

He felt a disgusted, impatient irritation. She's hot, he thought, but she's going to be coy.

"What's the matter, Christine?" he asked, forcing his voice to softness.

She looked squarely at him and he saw that it was anger that was stirring her.

She asked him a question quietly. "Does money mean so much to you that you'd do anything at all for it?"

His bewilderment made him feel angry. "Damned near anything."

"Even something disloyal—treacherous?"

"What the hell's all this about?" he said.

She swayed back closer to him. "Suppose you were fighting for China. And you had a chance to make money—more money—from the Japs."

"I'd take the job that paid better."

She let out her breath quietly, looking away from him. The shouting and the wailing cries up ahead were loud now. Christine stared toward them as she walked. She said in a low calm voice, "Oh, I didn't want to hate you."

Suddenly she seemed to hear the cries up ahead for the first time. She started running, half falling over the rubble strewn by the blast. Alan walked faster behind her.

Small figures, running crazily, were trying to put out the fires that brightened the night. Others were tending the wounded who had been dragged back

from the blaze. The dead lay scattered, mangled and untended where houses had been blown apart.

Christine went down on her knees beside a floundering yellow man with a red stump of leg. She turned a face full of horror to Alan.

"Help me! We've got to help him!"

Alan yanked her to her feet. "Come on, this isn't your job."

"But we've got to help them!"

"They'll get helped. Damn it, I've got to get to Chiang."

She faltered, "To Chiang?"

"Liang's sent me to get his help. To save Shanghai."

She stood wavering bewilderedly.

"D'you hear?" Alan shook her. "To save Shanghai!"

She nodded. "Yes—yes—"

Alan steered her forward roughly. She tried to turn back to the injured man, choking, "Oh, I'm sorry—"

She straightened then and pulled away and walked alone, not looking back.

They hurried around the fires and moved on for a long time without talking while the shells kept dropping, sometimes far away, sometimes near. An un-

easy feeling of anger stayed in Alan's chest. He cursed himself for bringing Christine. She hadn't meant what she'd said at the bar to get him to bring her. She was a touch-me-not, the lying little bitch. Thinking of the bar made him thirsty. "I wish I had a drink," he said.

Christine didn't answer.

There was gray in the sky to the east when they reached Tazang.

"You wait now," said Liang's orderly.

He left them to get the car, and they sat down on the steps of a house and smoked cigarettes.

They still didn't talk. The orderly was gone a long time. Alan glanced at Christine and saw she was trying not to show that she was very cold. "Move over here and I'll warm you," he said gruffly.

She sat still and he said nothing more. But when he looked at her again he saw her clenching her jaws to keep her teeth from chattering.

He reached and pulled her to him. She didn't resist. He held her passionlessly. "Give me your hands," he said.

She obeyed and he rubbed her hands hard. Then he put one arm back around her and with his other hand rubbed her arm and shoulder briskly.

Little by little her shivering stopped. Alan relaxed

his embrace to let her go if she wanted to. She sighed and laid her head on his shoulder wearily.

He let his cheek press her hair and felt the blood speeding in him. Her body felt warm against him now. They sat that way for what seemed a long while and Alan could feel his heart beating harder against her. He put his hand up and lifted her face. She didn't struggle as he kissed her. Her lips were ready and warm.

He held her tight in his arms and kissed her for a long time, hungrily.

Finally she struggled against him and put her hand on his chin and pushed his head back. She ducked her head to his shoulder and sat there, breathing hard. Alan could feel her body moving against him as she breathed.

"Will you tell me about you now?" he asked huskily.

"What about me?" Her voice came with difficulty too.

"A lot of things. What's a girl like you doing in a God-forsaken country like this?"

"I came out with my father."

"Where's he now?"

"He's dead."

Alan was silent a moment. "Killed in the war?"

"I'd rather not talk about it."

He pressed her closer to him. "What have you done since?"

He thought she wasn't going to answer.

"I've worked," she said.

"What kind of work?"

"Different kinds."

"For Americans or Chinese?"

"What does that matter?"

"I just wondered."

She said after a few moments, "For three years I was Oliver Neill's governess for his little boy."

Alan said, "That son of a bitch!"

He stared at Christine, thinking of Oliver Neill. He had heard about the tall playboy Englishman of forty-five who had grown mysteriously rich in Shanghai and then vanished when the war started. He was thinking of how the Chinese had discovered that Neill had been selling them out. He thought of the Neill he had seen a few times, thought of the handsome dark eyes always ready to ogle women whether white or yellow, and thought of Neill's heavy moist lips wet further from time to time by a nervous tongue. He said again, "That son of a bitch!"

Something stung his face, hard. Christine had slapped him. She was looking up at him, breathing hard, and her eyes were dark with anger.

Alan looked in her eyes and could see that she had been more than Neill's governess.

"*You* call him that," she said.

He put his hand to his smarting cheek, growing angry too. But under his anger he felt an exultation because now he knew he hadn't brought her along for nothing after all.

Liang's orderly drove up with the car. Alan thanked him in Chinese and wished him good luck and he left. "Get in," Alan said to Christine.

They both got in the front seat but she sat far away from him. There were two canteens of rice wine in the seat and Alan offered one to Christine. She shook her head and he took a long swig and then started driving out of Tazang toward the west.

It was an open car and the morning wind was cold but Christine stayed in her corner as they bumped over the narrow streets.

A few miles to the west they entered the broad Nanking road and Alan drove fast. They could hear the firing at Shanghai only faintly now.

There were dim figures along the side of the road.

Alan saw that they were refugees who had stopped to sleep. Christine peered at them with pity in her face but didn't speak. There were hundreds of them, whole families sleeping in wagons and carts and some of them sleeping on the wet grass.

As Alan and Christine drove on some of the Chinese awoke and came out on the road and started moving along toward the west. They shuffled slowly without looking back, and Alan had to weave crazily to keep from hitting them. At places the road was so clogged that he had to stop the car and wait to get through. The Chinese didn't seem to hear the horn. They kept milling slowly like sheep. Alan cursed but Christine didn't say anything. He looked down and saw that she had fallen asleep.

He tried to drive a little faster. Suddenly, near Soochow, a cry went up from the refugees in front of him, and far ahead Alan saw a detachment of troops moving down the road.

The sun was just coming up, and he could see the glare of the sunlight on the guns. The Chinese detachment looked pitifully small as it drew nearer, slowly, along the clogged highway.

The soldiers came close, and the refugees pressed to the side of the road and waved and cheered as the lor-

ries rolled by. The soldiers were well equipped and fresh. They grinned and waved as they passed.

Christine awoke and peered out dazedly. "What is it?"

"Chinese troops," Alan answered. "But not enough. Not near enough."

The soldiers passed and the refugees again swarmed out on the road. The car had to creep along once more in the hot morning sun. Alan took another long drink of the rice wine. He offered the canteen to Christine and this time she held it up to her mouth. But she made a face at the hot sour fumes.

"Try again," Alan said.

She tipped up the canteen and closed her eyes and took a long drink, then handed it back to him, shuddering. She closed her eyes again, settling her head on the back of the seat, not offering to talk. Alan didn't care because it was all he could do to drive through the Chinese on the road.

When he looked at Christine again he saw that she was asleep, with her lips slightly apart. She slept soundly in spite of her uncomfortable position, and he thought she must not have slept for a long time in Shanghai. She was still asleep and he was still wondering about her when the planes came.

They came in from the east, flying low. There were three snub-nosed naval bombers, flying one after another in a straight line. They had no escorting fighters and they flew in fast and circled over the road.

They spotted the troop lorries and opened up on them. Alan didn't look back. He stopped the car and jumped out, shouting and pulling at Christine. He ran for the side of the road. The refugees were screaming and milling crazily.

"Down!" Alan yelled in Chinese. "You crazy fools, down!"

No one listened. He looked for Christine. She was still in the car. She hadn't moved.

She was huddled down in the seat, looking back at the mess the planes were making of the Chinese troops. Some of the soldiers were trying to get out of the trucks. They fought each other to get over the sides but it didn't do any good because the big bombs, raining down, blew the running men high in the air. They twisted slowly, grotesquely, in the air as they fell.

Alan ran for the car. Christine looked at him but didn't see him. The blood had drained from her face and her eyes were glassy with horror. Alan put his hands under her arms and pulled her out of the car, dragging her toward the side of the road.

The planes had emptied their baskets of eggs and were flying low over the road with their guns blazing.

They roared over the car and the Chinese in the road went down like tenpins. The Japanese flew about a mile up the road, then turned and came back. The wounded and dying were screaming terribly.

"Help them! Help them!" sobbed Christine while Alan held her tightly down on the ground at the roadside. Suddenly she cried out sharply and Alan looked and saw on the side of her sweater a scarlet smear. It kept spreading while the last plane went over.

There was a little pool of water beside the road. Alan lifted Christine and shoved through the wild mob of Chinese around the pool.

He put her down near the water and ripped open her sweater. There were two ugly red holes just above her hip bone.

He saw then that Christine was looking at him, waiting, not saying a word. "You're okay," he told her. "They didn't get you very bad."

She shut her eyes. He threw aside his tunic, took off his shirt and tore a strip from it and knelt beside the pool. The water was clear where the Chinese, tending their injured, hadn't yet muddied it. Alan washed the blood away and then tied the rest of his

shirt tightly around Christine's waist binding the wound. He put on his tunic, buttoning it quickly, and lifted Christine.

The planes had finished their work and he carried her back to the car. He laid her on the back seat and unplugged a canteen.

"Drink this," he said.

She opened her eyes and he held her head while she obeyed. She looked up at him. "Will I be all right?"

"You're okay," he told her again. "It's not bad."

He took one of her hands and held it in both of his as he squatted beside her.

"It hurts," she said.

"Sure it does. But you'll be all right."

He leaned and kissed her cheek. It felt cold, and as he got out of the car his knees felt shaky for the first time. He climbed into the front seat. Slugs from the guns of the planes had ripped through the hood and shattered the windshield. For a moment he was afraid the motor wouldn't start, but it did. He drove ahead as fast as he could.

The Chinese had deserted the road. Only the dead and dying remained.

He looked back at Christine. She was watching him drive.

He said, "We'll be in Nanking soon and they'll fix you up there."

"Could you give me some more wine?"

He stopped the car and stretched back over his seat and held her head again while she drank. A queer feeling came in his throat as he looked at her white face and her gray eyes that were wide and clouded with pain. But even with a face like that, he thought, she can be a bum.

"That's enough," Christine whispered and sank back on the seat.

"You all right?"

"Yes."

He started the car. He looked up and saw the Japanese planes, far away now, specks in the sky. He thought, Run now, you bastards. You won't be able to run when I get something to fly.

He drove fast along the clear road.

CHAPTER THREE

IN NANKING Alan carried Christine into the Tzesheng Hospital. A bobbed-haired Chinese nurse got up from a desk in the lobby and came to meet him.

"She's been shot," he said.

The nurse led the way along the hall and stopped in front of the open door of a room. Alan went in and put Christine down on the narrow white bed.

Sunlight streamed through a window beside the bed and made golden lights in her blonde hair as she lay there. Alan stood looking down. He said to the nurse, "Take good care of her."

Christine's eyes were closed. He started tiptoeing away.

"Alan," he heard her say faintly. "Alan."

He turned back to the bed quickly and bent over it. He put his hand over hers.

She held onto his hand and said, "No—you go. I know you have to."

"I do have to," he told her. "But I'll be back. They'll have you all fixed up then. You'll be okay."

"Good-by," she whispered. "Thank you."

"Good-by, kid."

He took his hand away gently and went out of the room. He stopped at the reception desk and left fifty dollars in Chinese money. "I'll be back," he told the Chinese clerk. "If that's not enough to cover good care for her I'll pay the rest then."

He went back and stood in the hall and watched a young Chinese doctor go into Christine's room with the nurse. He still stood there after the two had disappeared. Then he turned abruptly and went out.

Outside the hospital refugees from Shanghai and the north moved through the streets. They moved slowly toward the Chinghuamen Gate, shuffling along in the sun without talking. Some of the feeble rode in rickshaws and carts but most of them walked, with their household goods slung over their backs. There were few men in the surging procession. Most of those moving west were women and children, some of the children too young yet to walk, others trudging along beside their mothers.

Alan drove slowly through the packed streets. A few blocks ahead most of the Chinese turned off toward the Yangtze where thousands were waiting for passage upriver to Hankow.

Farther on the streets were deserted. Houses and shops were boarded up and abandoned. Alan drove through the silent streets to the sprawling white bungalow near the Nanking Academy which was the home of Chiang.

A young Chinese soldier, standing guard at the door, nodded in recognition and allowed him to pass. Inside, Chiang's wife was playing solitaire at a table in a corner of the small living room. She put down her cards and came forward, smiling. "It is good to see you," she greeted him. "What is the news?"

She was wearing white slacks and a short-sleeved white sweater and small white cloth shoes. Her dark hair was long and she wore it in soft waves high on her head. Her brown eyes were friendly and warm, her lips full and red.

Alan said, "The war hasn't changed you. You look younger than ever."

She smiled again. "Do I? I do not have time in these days to think of my looks." She led him to a chair beside her own at the table and said again, "What is the news?"

Alan shook his head. "It's bad, I'm afraid. The Generalissimo must act fast. Is he here?"

"No. He left early and drove away to the east."

"That's bad."

"But I think he should be back soon."

"How soon?"

"Fairly soon, I think."

He walked back and forth nervously and Madame Chiang watched him. Finally she said, "Come and sit down."

Alan went back to the table and sat down, putting his clenched fists on the table. He leaned forward and looked at Chiang's wife. "You don't understand. There's no time to lose at Shanghai. Liang's maneuvered the Japanese into a trap and if Chiang were here the trap could be closed. But he'd have to act quickly. If there's a delay Liang will be caught."

Chiang's wife watched his eyes as he talked and when he had finished she shook her head slowly. For a time they were both silent. Then she said, "Look at your hands."

He looked down at his hands on the table. The knuckles stood out white on his tightly-clenched fists.

"Those are strong hands," she said. "Strong men are patient." She picked up the cards. "Have patience, my friend." She began arranging the cards in neat

Main

stacks on the table. "There will be many times in this war when we all must have patience."

She went ahead with her game and Alan sat there at the table and watched. But his thoughts were with Liang fighting and waiting for help. He could see Liang's calm face and he thought, Even if help doesn't come, Liang's face won't change. He'll be angry at first but he'll fight on and if the end comes his face will be calm. There's nothing Liang fears, not even death.

He sat there at the table for what seemed a long time. Then the soldier came into the room from his post outside the door. "The *Chungzeling* arrives now."

Alan sprang up and went to the door to watch Chiang's great bullet-proof limousine draw up. Through the thick windows of the car he could see the Chinese leader, and with him was the German, Baron von Frisch.

As he saw the baron Alan's body grew tense. His mouth felt dry and there was in the pit of his stomach the tight feeling that came with excitement.

The Generalissimo got out of the car and came striding up the walk with his black cape billowing over his shoulders. Behind him the gray-haired German strode stiffly.

Chiang saw Alan and attempted a smile, but the smile died wearily in the corners of his mouth. He shook hands, with a greeting, and swept inside. Von Frisch bowed curtly and followed him into the room.

The *Chungzeling's* wife hurried forward and helped him remove his cape. She followed him anxiously as he crossed the room and flung himself onto a worn leather sofa. He closed his eyes and tipped his head back. "Are things going badly?" she asked, putting her hand on his shoulder.

Chiang opened his eyes and looked up at his wife. He spoke in a shrill, strained voice. "I am tired, that is all."

Alan watched him. Chiang's eyes didn't look well. It was plain that he was worried. Alan looked at von Frisch sitting stiffly erect in a chair by the table, but he could tell nothing from the face of the German.

Madame Chiang clapped her hands sharply. "Amah!" she called. A curtain parted at the back of the room and a maid appeared, moving noiselessly in her cloth shoes.

She came into the room. She wore a simple blue cotton gown and kept her hands folded inside its broad sleeves. She had a plain patient face and stood with her eyes cast down.

Madame Chiang said, "Tea, amah," and the maid went away. She reappeared soon carrying a wooden table laid with bowls and chopsticks. There were small teacups on the table and a pewter wine jar and dishes containing ginger and pickle. Into three of the cups she poured tea, and one cup she filled with steaming hot water and handed to Chiang. Then she withdrew.

Chiang sipped the hot water and looked at the others gathered in the room. He looked at length at Alan and said, "Well, and what brings you here?"

Alan felt his heart quicken. He came forward and said, "I've got a message for you. Could I see you alone?"

Chiang shook his head impatiently. "Speak out."

Alan hesitated. "I'd rather——"

"Speak out," cried Chiang. "There are no secrets here."

Alan said, "Liang sent me to ask you for help."

He looked at von Frisch and saw the German lean forward and stiffen.

Chiang asked, "What help does he need?"

Alan told of Liang's plan. He explained how Liang's troops had moved out in the night and he could see Chiang's eyes light up as he described how the Japanese were moving into the trap. He told how Liang's

gunners were fighting and Chiang leaned forward and smiled as he learned of the heavy toll the gunners were taking. Alan studied Chiang's face and thought, Liang will get what he wants in spite of the German.

"There's no time to lose," he said. "You've got to act fast or Liang will be trapped."

Chiang was silent, rubbing his chin. Alan could see him weighing the plan and could see that he thought well of it. He stood there waiting for Chiang to speak, but von Frisch spoke first.

"No troops will be sent."

Alan turned quickly and glared at him. "What do you mean?"

Von Frisch ignored the question and spoke to Chiang. "This maneuver was undertaken against my orders. I refuse to support it."

The light went out of the Generalissimo's eyes and he sank back on the worn sofa and sipped from the cup of hot water.

Alan bent over him, his face flushed and angry. "You must listen," he said. "You must send the troops."

Chiang rubbed his hands over his eyes. "*Mei-yu fa-tze*. It cannot be done."

Von Frisch nodded. "That is so," he said. "It is too late."

Alan wheeled and faced the German angrily.

"We have had other news from Shanghai," von Frisch said. He pursed his thin lips and drummed on the table with the tips of his fingers. He was wearing a high-collared khaki uniform and there was a long-barreled German automatic strapped at his waist, but his hands were small and well groomed and they didn't look like the hands of a soldier. "The Japanese have forced a fresh landing south of Shanghai," he said, "and they are moving north to encircle us there. We have just learned of this and we have ordered General Chu to fall back from his positions south of the city."

"But what of Liang's troops?"

Von Frisch smiled faintly. "That is Liang's concern." For a time he was silent, his fingers drumming on the table. Then he said, "In a way it is good. His maneuver will keep a strong force of the enemy occupied while Chu withdraws to the south." He nodded stiffly. "Yes, it is good," he said. "It is a small price to pay."

Alan looked at von Frisch's thin, emotionless face and he could understand why Borisov hated the Germans.

He watched von Frisch drumming with his fingers on the top of the table. No, you German son of a bitch, he thought, you don't care if Liang is caught in the trap because it won't be you—your skin'll be safe.

He turned back to Chiang and bent over the sofa and said, "You're not going to listen to him." His angry face was thrust close to Chiang's and for a moment Chiang, too, became angry.

"Watch your tongue!" he snapped out. But the anger quickly went out of the Generalissimo's eyes. He leaned forward and put down the teacup. "I am sorry, but you have heard why it cannot be done."

He shrugged and got up from the sofa and went into the next room and for a time there was silence. Then from the inner room came the thin sound of music. The Generalissimo was preparing to sleep and was playing Schubert's "Ave Maria" on his wheezy old gramophone.

Alan listened to the whining strains of the music. The record played through and there was no other sound from the inner room.

Madame Chiang's cup tinkled. Alan could feel von Frisch watching him. He stood there ignoring the German, trying to straighten out his thoughts. At first he was not able to realize that what Chiang said was the

end of the thing, and that it was the end, too, for Liang. Then realization came and with it a sort of numbness that was almost indifference. I've done my part, he thought, I've earned my pay. A new thought came to him then. With Liang dead there would be no more pay. Well, there'd be a new job somewhere. He felt von Frisch's eye again, and the sight of the man sitting there calmly and refusing to help made his face grow hot again with anger. He went to the table and poured a glass of the wine.

Von Frisch, watching him, said, "Your thirst matches your insolence."

Alan turned with the wine in his hand.

The German rose. "My orders are final," he said slowly. "Some day you and the others will learn that."

His lips were drawn thin.

Alan was silent, breathing hard, his face flushed.

"Or perhaps," said the German, "you feel that you are better equipped to direct the armies than I?"

He was sneering. His face was livid and ugly, with the bony cheeks stretched tightly.

Alan felt the blood pound in his temples. He gripped the wine glass and the room grew still. "Maybe you're right," he said.

He thought, It's here now, let it come. He moved for-

ward and stood close to von Frisch. "Maybe someone should tell you it was a mistake to try to hold Shanghai without planes."

He watched the man's face working with fury. It gave him a strange fierce feeling of pleasure. "Maybe too, someone should tell you you killed all those who're dead at Shanghai."

The German's hand fell to the automatic strapped at his waist.

Madame Chiang drew in her breath. It made a sharp sound in the room. She started to rise, then remained tense, half sitting, half standing.

The muscles twitched in the German's face. Alan watched the hand on the gun. He saw that it didn't move. He thought, He hasn't got enough guts.

"Why don't you shoot?" he demanded.

His voice broke the tension. Von Frisch relaxed. "I am sure you were jesting," he said. He turned and walked out of the room.

Madame Chiang sank back in her chair. "Young fool!" she said. She was looking at Alan but her eyes were not angry.

Alan went outside and stood in the sunlight. He thought, This isn't the end of it; I'll meet the bastard again. . . . Then he thought of Liang waiting at Shanghai.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE road to the east was full of troops moving back from Shanghai. They moved in long columns, some in camouflaged trucks and in big covered vans, but most of them were on foot and clouds of dust rose above the road as they moved along in the sun.

Staff cars of the Eighty-seventh and Eighty-eighth Divisions crept along in the dust too. Now and then one would turn out and dash past a long blue-gray line of troops.

At the side of the road were endless lines of refugees moving west. They looked at Alan curiously as he drove eastward along the clogged road. He had to stop several times to let the troops by. He drove on and then stopped again. A staff car drew up beside him and a hoarse voice called out, "Who goes there?"

A bulky figure got out of the car. It was the Russian giant, Borisov.

He came over grinning, with his yellow teeth bared. "I have been looking for you," he said.

He drew a great battered flask from inside his

sweater. "The last time we drank you suddenly were not there. It was most strange."

He grinned as he watched Alan tip the flask up and drink. Then he noticed the bullet holes in the hood of the car and the blood in the seat where Christine had been.

"Ho, what goes on? I have missed something?"

"Nothing important," Alan said.

Borisov wagged his head. "Any blood is important. Have you been hurt?"

"No."

"Who was hurt, then?"

"Someone who was with me."

"Where have you been?"

Alan told of his visit to Chiang. "I almost did get shot," he said. "I had a row with your friend von Frisch."

Borisov's face grew dark and he spat on the side of the road. "That German bastard!" he said. "What has he done now?"

"It's not what he's done, it's what he won't do."

Alan told how the baron had refused to send troops to help Liang. He said, "Chiang likes Liang and believes in him. He was ready to act when von Frisch interfered. That's when the trouble started."

Borisov shook his head. "And what now?"

"I'm going back and get Liang out of there."

"Ah, that is good."

Borisov took the flask and drank and then stood beside the car and they watched the troops moving by.

The road was soon clear and Alan waved and started ahead. Then suddenly Borisov was running beside the car and vaulting over its side.

"I will go with you!"

"I thought you would," Alan said.

They drove ahead, slowly, in silence. Borisov smoked a long Russian cigarette and took frequent drinks from the flask. Now and then he would give Alan a drink, but mostly he drank alone and his dark face became flushed as they drove.

"It makes me sick to see these things happening here," he said. "I know that they are not necessary and I have to remain and see them. It makes me sick because I cannot change the way things are going."

Alan said nothing. Borisov went on: "I cannot see why they allow the Germans to stay when they see what occurs when the Germans are giving the orders. They are good soldiers, yes, and they inflict discipline on the troops. But their tactics are the worst I have ever seen. Is it not so?"

"That's so," Alan agreed.

Borisov removed his beret and rubbed his hands over the dark stubble of his hair. He spat over the side of the car in disgust. "Bah! This fighting at Shanghai is not the way this war should be fought. It is a hopeless thing to try to defeat the Japanese without weapons. They are losing Shanghai and they will lose all of China unless their tactics are changed."

"How would you fight without weapons?" Alan asked. He knew the answer but he knew too that Borisov always wanted to say it again.

Borisov leaned close to him and spoke earnestly. "I've told you there must be guerillas. Until China is strong there must be no battles, only guerilla attacks—organized guerilla warfare. I've told you, you must fall back and give ground until the enemy's lines are extended, and then—" he smacked his big hands together—"you strike like that," he said, "unexpectedly, and then you fall back. And at the same time you build up your arms."

Alan shook his head. "Arms won't be easy to get."

Borisov spat again. "Bah! They will not be easy to get from the Germans. But from Russia, yes, and from America, yes. Chiang knows this. And still he keeps his damned Germans."

The lines of troops on the road had thinned out and

now there were only a few supply trucks and a trickle of stragglers. Alan and Borisov drove through the plodding refugees and in the distance they could hear the faint thunder of the guns at Shanghai. They drove along swiftly and the noise from the guns grew louder and swelled into a deafening roar.

Near Lotien they reached the new Chinese line of defense, flung up hurriedly to cover the retreat of the troops. The line ran from outside the northern border of the International Settlement to a point a few miles below the town of Lotien. It was a thin line, guarded mostly by scattered nests of machine guns, but it was outside the range of the Japanese fleet in the Whangpoo.

A Chinese sentry guarding a sandbag barricade stopped the car when it reached the new line and told Alan it would be unsafe to proceed. He was a young man, as were most of the troops. "There is a rear-guard action being fought at Shanghai," he said in good English, "but there will soon be a break-through and then there will be fighting along this road."

Alan got out of the car. "Nevertheless," he said, "we'll go through."

The sentry's face did not change. He said again, "I cannot allow this car to proceed."

Borisov said, "What is this?" He vaulted out of the car and approached the sentry. "Who is to stop us?"

His hand rested on the butt of his gun, but the fellow did not flinch. "If you go through you go on foot," he said. "The car does not pass."

Borisov drew his gun and roared, "Who is to stop us?"

He took a step forward. Then he suddenly stopped and put his clenched fists on his hips, with the gun in his right hand, and threw his head back and laughed. He stood with his legs spraddled apart and laughed with his yellow teeth showing and the veins standing out on his throat.

Finally he said, "This is a soldier. He does not even fear me." He turned to Alan. "Come, we will walk."

Together they walked along the side of the road in the gathering dusk. Now and then Borisov would explode into laughter. Once he said: "What I could not do for Chiang with men like that at my back!"

After that he was silent.

The sound of battle grew louder. Alan turned to Borisov and said, "Follow me." They ran through the dusk into Shanghai as the shells and the bombs dropped from the sky. The Japanese planes had the

sky to themselves, and they circled and dived, bombing and strafing.

In Nantao the safety zone overflowed and outside the French Concession thousands of refugees battered at the big gates. French troops and gendarmes beat them back with bayonets and clubs but still they came on. Some of them climbed the high, barbed-wire fence and fell inside, bleeding and screaming.

The Avenue des Deux Républiques, borderline of Nantao, was crowded with women and children. They clung to their places on the sidewalks and in the roadway, shrieking as the soldiers rained blows with the butts of their rifles.

From Chapei came the sound of furious fighting. Alan heard it and knew that that was where Liang was. The battle had started. He fought his way through the streets with Borisov at his side and they reached Soochow Creek and looked out over the narrow causeway to Chapei.

Across the creek was a vast no man's land, littered with the dead of both sides. Beyond that in small compact groups Liang's troops remained and poured fire into the steel-helmeted Japanese bluejackets moving in from the lush river delta. Waves of Japanese tanks led the attack, blazing away with their guns as they

roared down on the Chinese positions. Behind them came masses of infantrymen, advancing cautiously with bayonets fixed.

The Chinese tore rails from the railroads behind them and made pronged steel traps for the tanks. The tanks stalled in the traps and Liang's machine-gunners mowed down the troops moving in behind.

Alan stood at the edge of the creek watching the battle. Japanese shells rained on the causeway and, as he stood there, he knew that he was too late. He stood a long time watching the shells fall on the causeway. He watched, with his face tight, and finally he started to turn away.

Then, through the dusk, just as he turned, he saw Liang directing his troops.

Liang was moving along behind the sandbags, ignoring the Japanese fire. He was bending low to speak to his men, putting his hand on their shoulders, encouraging them.

Alan, watching, felt a great bitterness swell in his throat. He turned to Borisov and shouted, "That's the man they don't want! Come on, let's get him out of there." He bent low and ran out over the causeway.

Borisov stood for a moment watching him go. Then

he ran too, toward the Chinese lines on the other side of the causeway.

Alan reached the sandbags and waved and shouted to Liang.

Liang looked back and saw him and smiled. Beads of sweat stood out on his face. It was streaked with dirt, but there was a strange happy glow in his eyes. He came forward, crouching behind the sandbags and moving swiftly with the grace of an athlete. He reached Alan and held out his hand and with his left hand he took Borisov's. "I am glad you have come," he said. He was breathing heavily, but his shattered right hand gripped Alan's with a hard strength. "I was beginning to worry," he said. "As you can see, the battle began prematurely." He waved toward his troops. "They are giving a good account of themselves, but we will need help before long. When does Chiang plan to attack?"

Alan started to speak, and said nothing.

Borisov said, "There will be no attack."

They stood there and Liang did not speak. They stood while the machine guns chattered around them. Alan looked at Liang's face. For the first time the Chinese did not look young. He looked tired and his eyes had gone dull and lifeless. But no resentment

showed in them. At last he said, "Well, it will still be what you call a good show."

He wiped the grime from his face with his sleeve and turned and started back to his troops.

Alan ran after him. "Wait!" he called. "You're coming with me. You've got to get out of here." He grabbed Liang's arm.

Liang put his hand on Alan's shoulder. "I am staying," he said. He broke away and ran back along the thin line.

Borisov stood beside Alan, watching him go. He said, "There is a soldier." Then he added, "We must get out of here now."

"I'm staying with Liang," Alan said.

Borisov caught his arm and spun him around. "Don't be a fool. You are coming with me."

Alan struggled to break the Russian's grip on his arm and they fought there in the dusk while the shells fell around them. Alan's flushed face was close to the Russian's. He said, "God damn you! Let me go." But he was no match for the other and Borisov picked him up still struggling and carried him back over the causeway.

He put him down at the end of the causeway and stood over him, panting, with the sweat standing out

on his face. "We have work to do," he said. "It would not do any good to lose your life, too."

They stood there at the end of the causeway and watched Liang's men falling back.

The Chinese fought well but nothing could stand in the face of the fire from the tanks and the shells of the fleet in the Whangpoo and the bombs of the low-flying planes overhead.

Liang slowly fell back and at last the remnants of his troops scurried into a battered warehouse across the creek in Chapei.

There in the dark shattered building they set up their guns hurriedly and from the great gaping holes that had been windows they sent out sheets of fire.

Against that fire the Japanese could not advance.

Chinese men and women gathered in the streets of the neutral zone behind the causeway and set up the sing-song chant of China's victory song. "*Chungkuo puhwei wang*," they sang. "*Chungkuo puhwei wang*."

For China cannot perish.

Their voices rose and fell while the Japanese hammered away at the walls of the warehouse with three-inch guns.

Bit by bit the walls fell, but the fire from the Chinese in the warehouse did not slacken. Suddenly from the

roof of the warehouse a banner of blue floated up, with a sixteen-point sun dazzling white in the light of the searchlights of the ships in the Whangpoo.

It was the flag of the Chinese Republic and a loud cheer went up from the Chinese watching the battle.

In a window at the rear of the warehouse a grim smoke-stained face appeared. For a moment it stayed there, ghostly and pale in the dim light. Then a hand waved and Alan could see that it was Liang's hand, with two fingers missing.

He thought, It's his way of saying good-by. He shouted and waved back to Liang but there was too much noise from the guns and the face disappeared from the window.

Alan looked away from the warehouse. Behind him the crowds had grown larger. Hundreds of curious from the International Settlement had come out to watch the Chinese last stand. There were dozens of cars in the street and men and women stood on top of the cars to get a better view of the battle. While he watched, a uniformed chauffeur jumped out of a sleek limousine and helped a khaki-clad figure descend.

Alan saw it was von Frisch getting out of the car.

The German pushed his way through the crowd and stood beside Alan, watching the battle.

Neither spoke. They stood there watching the Japanese guns batter the walls of the warehouse.

Finally the German asked, "Liang is in there?"

Alan looked at him, his face gray and hard in the flickering light. "Yes, he's in there."

Von Frisch nodded. "It is just as well this way."

His voice was calm. Alan whirled. Von Frisch spoke without looking at him. "It will save me the trouble of having him shot for disobeying my orders."

Alan said, "You son of a bitch!"

His right hand lashed out, palm open, and cut across Von Frisch's face.

Von Frisch screamed a curse. He staggered back, gun in hand.

Alan stood stiffly, waiting.

Borisov drew his gun and leaped forward. The German saw him and whirled. For a moment they stood there, facing each other.

Then a slender black-robed figure stepped out of the crowd and moved forward, a thin hand upraised. It was the French priest, Father François. He stood between the two men and spoke quietly. "We are not fighting each other," he said. "Look out there— isn't that enough of fighting?" He waved his hand toward the warehouse.

Once again Alan felt the compelling power of the old priest.

Borisov looked out at the battle and slowly lowered his gun.

Von Frisch relaxed also and stood rubbing his cheek. But the anger had not gone out of his face. He looked at Alan and said, "I do not forget."

He put his gun back in its holster and turned and went to his car.

He drove away slowly and Alan stood beside Father François and watched the walls of the battered warehouse slowly crumble.

Then fire broke out in the warehouse and Liang and his men could not stay there and live.

Alan saw dim shapes slipping out of the warehouse and running across the causeway through the blazing gantlet of fire. He strained his eyes in the darkness to see if one of the running figures was Liang.

But he could not see clearly. He watched the men run and some of them made it and ran panting and sweating and grimy into the crowd at the end of the causeway, but many of the running soldiers went down on the causeway and lay still.

Then the warehouse burst into furious flame and out of it came a slim straight figure that did not bend

down as it crossed the shell-swept causeway. It moved erect through the shellfire. But midway the running man bent and clutched at his belly.

The light came down across the fluttering Chinese flag on the warehouse and Alan saw Liang on his face in the dirt. He cried out but Borisov shoved him back. The Russian ran out across the thin strip of death and gathered Liang in his arms and ran back while the women sang and the fire in the warehouse crackled and roared.

Borisov came carrying Liang while the Chinese clustered around. He put the slim soldier down in the dirt of the road and Alan bent down but Liang could not see him.

Liang's eyes were closed and he clutched at his belly and died.

Alan rose and stood looking down at the still figure of Liang and kept trying to swallow.

Father François was standing beside him, then, putting his hand on his shoulder. "My son, these men die, but their lives are not wasted."

Alan looked at the priest. Father François' eyes were sad, but there was a calmness and strength in his face. He said, "Go now. I will take care of him."

CHAPTER FIVE

BORISOV took hold of Alan's arm and turned him away and they walked back along the dark street. The Russian said, "Well, it is over now."

They came into Bubbling Well Road. Just ahead were the lights of the Burlington Hotel. Borisov said, "I have a drink upstairs." And they went through the crowded lobby of the hotel and to his room.

Alan sat down on the bed and rubbed his hands over his eyes.

Borisov looked at him worriedly. Then he walked to his mirror and stood in front of it and peered at his great ugly self and made faces. "Look at my face," he said loudly. "Look. It does not improve." He moved his hand over his stubble of beard and then with one finger traced the jagged white scar on his cheek. "Look at me. I am truly foul-looking."

Alan looked up. Borisov opened the top drawer of the dresser and took out a tall bottle of vodka and filled two glasses on the dresser with the clear liquor. One of the glasses he handed to Alan and the other he

drained and refilled. Then he went over and sat in a big leather chair and threw his legs over its arm. He drank and said, "Well, we have seen the end of Shanghai."

Alan didn't answer. He leaned back on the bed and drank big gulps of the vodka. The drink tasted good. "We should spend more time drinking," he said.

"Is it not what I have told you?" Borisov said. "Yet today you would have had your last drink."

"What do you mean?"

"You would be with Liang now, if I had not pulled you away."

Alan shook his head. "I know. Thanks. Jesus Christ, what ever made me do a damn-fool thing like that?"

"I cannot imagine. A tough guy like you would never do that—unless he were drinking." The Russian was grinning.

Alan shrugged. "Well," he said, "I did my job, even if I won't get any pay for it."

"That's better," Borisov said, grinning still. "Never mind. Soon you will earn pay again. Meanwhile, we must get out of here. The Japanese will be coming in soon. But tonight we will stay. I think it would do you good to get drunk. Besides, after your quarrel

with von Frisch it might be unhealthy to try to leave Shanghai tonight."

He got up from the chair and filled Alan's glass again and stood looking at him. "It would not hurt you," he said, "to bathe."

Alan turned up his glass and a trickle of vodka ran down the black beard on his chin. He felt better with the vodka inside and he mopped his chin with his hand and looked up at the Russian. "Go to hell. I bathe when I please."

"No, I mean it." Borisov pulled Alan up from the bed. He stood with his hands on his hips, shaking his head. "You would not be a pretty thing for a woman."

Alan drank again. "You're a big ugly bastard and you're always thinking of women." But he went into the bathroom, filled the tub noisily, and took off his clothes.

Borisov followed him and put down the seat of the toilet and sat down to watch Alan rubbing himself with the soap.

"You had better take your time in that bath," he said. "There is talk that the Germans will go before long and that we will get planes and then you will not have a chance for a bath."

Alan threw the warm water up on himself and rinsed off the lather. "I hope you're right. I want to get back in the air."

He got out of the tub and stood in front of the mirror and rubbed shaving cream on his chin.

Borisov watched him shave. "What did you do with your shirt?" he asked finally.

Alan turned, his chin covered with lather. "There was a raid on the road. The girl who was with me was shot."

Borisov shook his head waggishly. "You were with a woman?"

"It was the American girl that I met in the bar. She was wounded and I used the shirt to bandage the wound."

Borisov picked up his glass. "It does not matter. I will give you a shirt."

Alan finished shaving and dressed. Borisov opened a drawer of his dresser and took out a big khaki shirt. "Put this on and let us see how you look."

Alan put the big shirt on. It hung loosely on his broad shoulders. He rolled up the sleeves and left the neck open. "You're too big to be any good," he said.

Borisov laughed. "I am always with midgets." He

poured out a drink. "But at any rate you look better and I will try to find you a woman."

"Don't bother," Alan said. "I don't want a woman." He thought of Christine alone in the hospital at Nanking. He said again, "I don't want a woman."

But Borisov said, "Yes. That is what you need now."

They turned out the lights and went out into the night. The fires in Chapei still burned and they walked along in the flickering light. They reached the Race Course, where the white British ensign still waved. Across the street from the Race Course the lights of a dance hall were shining. "That is the place," Borisov said.

They climbed the stairs to a dimly lighted ballroom where a Filipino jazz band was playing and sat down at a table.

A young Chinese waiter came to their table and Borisov ordered drinks. "Here," he told Alan, "there is nothing to remind you of war."

Alan looked around the crowded ballroom. It seemed queer to see dancing here while outside, so close, there was a war going on. He remembered then the curious way in which the International Settlement was detached from the rest of Shanghai. It was not

involved in the war, because of its independent international status, and it still tried to go about the everyday business of life and ignore the shells that fell inside its borders.

The waiter came back with their drinks. Alan drank slowly and thought that it was good to be where there was nothing to make him think of the war.

Dim lights were concealed in the moldings at the sides of the room. Suspended over the dance floor was a great glass ball with many facets that kept turning, throwing points of light on the dancers.

The music stopped. The dancers came back to their tables and for a time the ballroom was quiet. Then from behind a big golden curtain at the back of the room a Chinese girl came and walked along slowly until she was under the glass ball of light.

She had curls that fell to her shoulders, and she wore a dark gown that was split high at the sides and red velvet slippers, and as she moved her hips swayed.

Her face was white as she stood under the lights and there was rouge on her lips. She stood with her hands on her hips and sang in a rich throaty voice, and as she sang her hips constantly moved.

Alan felt his temples grow hot as he sat and drank, watching the girl.

Then she stopped singing and stood under the light, smiling and bowing.

The dancers applauded and some of them whistled and pounded the tables. The girl smiled at them and turned around and walked slowly back with her hands on her hips, disappearing through the curtain.

Borisov put his glass down on the table and laughed. He was getting drunk. He said, "That is Mai Taoling, and she is quite good." He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "I have slept with her and she is a good woman in bed, but she is not the one for tonight. You will see."

The music had stopped and it was hot in the ballroom. Alan looked at the empty glass in his hand. "You can have your damn women," he said. "I'd rather get drunk."

Borisov laughed again and put out his hand and patted Alan's shoulder as he would that of a child. "That is all right for now. You will not feel that way later." He turned around in his chair and looked around the silent ballroom and roared, "Where is that waiter!" His voice shook the room.

Alan said, "You're too noisy," and Borisov slapped his huge thigh and roared.

From out of the shadows the waiter appeared, grin-

ning and hurrying forward with his arms folded. The Russian scowled fiercely and said, "Look at my friend. He has nothing to drink." The waiter nodded and started away. Borisov called after him, "This time bring a bottle. We cannot waste time with one drink."

The music began again but the dancers did not get up from their tables. The music grew louder and Alan felt dizzy and tired. His head ached and he put it down on the table. A brilliant red spotlight focused on the curtain at the back of the room. Borisov leaned across and shook Alan and said, "Ho, look now and you will see something."

The music rose and fell, throbbing. Alan lifted his head and watched the spotlight play on the curtain.

The curtain parted and a white woman came out into the room, nearly nude. She looked like a Russian.

She stood there in front of the curtain with her eyes closed and her head back and her lips slightly parted and her full breasts thrust forward and upward while the brilliant light played on her naked white thighs. She stood perfectly still, and Alan could hear Borisov suck in his breath.

The room was silent and tense and then the woman started to move.

She moved at first slowly, with her head still erect

and her arms by her sides and at first only her legs took part in the dance.

She moved forward slowly into the room and the drums of the band rose and fell and the dancer's white thighs parted wide and she thrust her hips forward and put her hands on them and her whole body moved to the music. The big Russian pounded Alan's shoulder and cried, "What do you say now to a woman?"

Alan leaned on the table, watching the dance, and his eyes were on the woman's white thighs. The music came to him faintly and his face became flushed and he swayed in his chair as he looked at the dancer.

The waiter came back with a bottle of vodka and Alan reached out and took it and filled his glass without taking his eyes off the moving woman.

Borisov watched him and laughed. "That is better," he said. "What do you think of her?"

Alan drank. "She's built," he said.

"She is that, and more than that. I will show you."

He got up from the table and walked over and stood in the circle of light at the side of the dance floor. The Russian woman saw him and smiled.

Borisov came back and sat down and the woman came over and danced in front of their table. She had straight bobbed black hair and flashing dark eyes with

heavy long lashes and full red-painted lips. She wore high-heeled golden sandals and transparent net covered her thighs and her breasts. Through the black net Alan could see the firm rounded points of her breasts.

She stood over him smiling and moved close to the table and spread her white thighs wide apart and bent backward, moving her hips, until her hands touched the floor. She remained there with her legs spread and her body moving close to the floor and her dark hair falling back from her head while the dancers shouted and pounded the tables and the music swelled into a sobbing crescendo.

Then her body moved forward and her white legs flashed through the air and she stood again on her feet, breathless and smiling, with her hands on her hips.

Borisov put out his hand and drew her down into a chair at the table. "Ho!" he said. "That is truly a dance."

She put her hand out and pinched his scarred cheek and said, "You can talk." Her voice was husky and deep. She looked across at Alan and said, "Who is this?"

Borisov said, "This is my friend. But he is no good. All he does is get drunk." He put his arm around

Alan's shoulders and said, "Smile now for Mitzi."

Mitzi frowned and said, "He is a pretty one. Leave him alone."

She leaned back in her chair and looked up at the Russian and said, "You are drunk too."

Then she leaned close to Alan. "Do not mind him. He is a big ugly Russian." And she put her hand on his arm and said, "Did you like my dance, too?"

Alan was drunk. He looked down at her slim scented fingers and said, "I wasn't watching the dance, I was looking at you."

She put her head back and laughed a deep laugh. She had an oval face with high rounded cheekbones, and when she laughed small wrinkles came in the side of her nose. She looked across at the Russian. "You see, Borisov, you are all just alike. There is no difference."

She leaned back in her chair, breathing hard from the dance. Alan poured out a glass of the vodka and said, "You must need a drink after that."

Borisov said, "Ho! Now he wants to get you drunk too." He laughed and rubbed his hands over his hair.

Alan said, "Go to hell!" And to Mitzi he said, "Don't listen to him."

She drank. "I have not heard what he says."

The music started again and the dancers came out on the floor.

Alan looked at the dancers and then his blurring eyes turned to Mitzi and he watched her drinking and laughing. Soon he put his head on the table but he still heard the voices beside him.

Mitzi reached over and patted his head. "He is a nice boy."

"He is my friend," Borisov said. "Tonight he has lost a friend." He told Mitzi of what had happened.

"Oh, I am so sorry for him," she said. "I would like to help him."

"You can do that," Borisov said. "He must hide tonight." They talked some more and then Borisov said, "Come, let us leave here."

Mitzi got up at once from the table. "All right. I will meet you outside."

Borisov rose and stood over Alan. "Come, we are going." Alan didn't move, so Borisov put his hands under his arms and lifted him up from the table. He held him erect and Alan opened his eyes. Borisov said again, "We are leaving." He put his arm around Alan's waist and propelled him out of the dance hall.

Outside there was quiet. There was only the desultory firing of the mopping-up squads in Chapei. Alan

leaned against the big Russian and saw Mitzi descending the stairs from the ballroom.

"Hurry up," Borisov called to her. "I cannot hold this midget all night."

Mitzi came out in a white hooded cape. "I did hurry." She opened the front of the cape. "Do you see? I did not take time to get dressed."

Borisov looked at her and shook his head. "You are truly a woman."

They walked along in the dark and came into Peking Road.

"Are we going to my room?" Mitzi asked.

"Yes. I am going to leave him with you."

They turned into Avenue Edouard VII and soon reached a small Chinese hotel. A hotel boy helped them get Alan through the lobby and to the Russian girl's room. He opened the door and then went away.

Borisov put Alan down on the big curtained bed. He stood there looking down and Alan heard him say, "He is tired."

Mitzi took off her white cape and stood near the door. "I will take care of him," she said.

Borisov went to the door and stood rubbing his hair. "I did not want him to know that I worried," he said. "He quarreled with von Frisch and the Ger-

man will kill him if we are not careful. But he would not look for him here." He put on his beret. "I will come back. He must be out of Shanghai before the Japanese come in."

He went out and closed the door. Mitzi came toward the bed, looking at Alan. He lay stretched out on his back with one arm under his head. He was not quite asleep but he was too drunk to move. He felt Mitzi unlace his thick boots and heard her put them beside the bed. Then she took off the shirt that was Borisov's and removed the rest of his clothes, and pulled the bedclothes from under him and covered him. Alan tried to open his eyes.

"It is all right," Mitzi said. "Go to sleep." She stood beside the bed and took off the costume in which she had danced and sat down on the bed and kicked off her gold sandals. Then she pushed back the thin curtain at the side of the bed and got in beside Alan.

He tried to stay awake and turn to her but he fell asleep.

Sometime later he stirred in his sleep and rolled on his side and his body brushed against Mitzi's.

He opened his eyes then, but he was not fully awake and he did not recognize her. His eyes were puzzled as he stared about the dimly lighted room.

Mitzi put up her hand and touched his face. "It is all right," she said. "You have been sleeping."

His eyes closed again. He moved close to her and put his arm across her, resting his hand on her smooth naked back.

For a time he lay still, half-asleep, with his face against her dark hair, and slowly the warmth of her thighs came into his and he moved his hand on her back.

Her body was fragrant with heavy Russian perfume. Alan's head swam as he moved his hand down from her back and pulled her tight up against him. He pressed his thighs against hers and he could feel himself sinking. . . .

After a time Alan opened his eyes and Mitzi opened her sultry dark ones and looked up at him, smiling.

She put her hand up and twisted his hair and said, "You are nice."

Alan looked down at her dark hair on the pillow and thought it was strange that this had happened. He turned on his back and put his hand under his head and lay looking up at the bed's canopy. "You're nice too," he said.

He lay there quietly and Mitzi watched him. "What are you thinking?" she asked.

He didn't look at her. "I was thinking a lot of things."

"What things?"

"I was thinking of what happened tonight."

"Of me?"

"Yes."

He was quiet for a time.

"No, who are you really thinking of?" Mitzi asked.

Alan turned over and smiled. He put his hand under her chin and said, "You're funny."

She moved closer to him. "Tell me. Is she a blonde or dark like me?"

"She's blonde," Alan said.

She sat up in bed and looked down at him. "And do you think your golden one is better than I?"

She was pouting and Alan laughed up at her. "I doubt that. You're good. You must have known plenty of men."

Mitzi shrugged. "And why not? It is what a woman is for." She sat there quietly, looking at him. "I have loved many men, but some are better than others."

And she said, "I have loved Borisov, but he is fierce when he loves, like a bear. You are better."

She bent over his face and kissed him. Then she

put her hand on his body and said huskily, "Your body is nice. It is brown and strong." She kissed him again and put her head down beside his.

"Do you have a drink here?" Alan asked.

She nodded and leaned over the side of the bed and poured a drink of Chinese rice wine from a silver decanter. She gave it to him and he drank it. Then she turned out the lights and they slept.

CHAPTER SIX

THE gray light of dawn came into the room where they slept. Alan awoke and stirred in the bed. Mitzi awoke, too, and he saw her and at first he was puzzled again. Then he remembered and smiled and she smiled at him and asked, "Did you sleep well?"

She still wore the rouge that had been on her cheeks when she danced and it was too vivid in the gray light of day. But aside from the rouge her face was clean-looking and fresh.

She lay on her side, with one arm under her head, and he could see the length of her body and it, too, was clean and fresh-looking.

She lay still and watched him looking at her. "Do I pass the inspection?" she asked.

Mitzi was smiling and there were fine wrinkles at the sides of her nose. Her brown eyes with the heavy black lashes were partially closed. Her full red-painted lips were smiling and her white teeth showed as she smiled. Alan looked at her and thought, She's like Borisov, she does what she pleases.

"Yes, you pass the inspection," he said. He put

out his hand and touched her under the chin. "You're okay."

She moved closer. He put his arms around her and pulled her to him. He bent over and kissed her, with his eyes shut, and he could feel her responding.

Outside a motorcycle suddenly roared close and came to a stop. Alan opened his eyes. "My God," he said. "I've got to get out of here." He sat up.

Mitzi held on to him. "No," she begged. "Why must you go now?"

He shook her hand off. "Those yellow bastards will be coming in here."

"But they can't come in here," Mitzi said. "It is against the law for belligerents to come into the International Settlement if they come on the business of war."

"You don't know those babies. They'll find a way to get in."

He got out of bed. Mitzi watched him dressing at the side of the bed. When he sat down to put on his boots, she ran her fingers along his spine where it showed through the back of his shirt. "I am sorry," she said, "that you have to leave now."

He finished lacing his boots and stood up. "If I stayed any longer in that bed nothing could get me to

leave, even the war. That's the first time I've slept in three days."

He looked down at the decanter at the side of the bed and said, "Did I drink all the wine?"

"No, there is more." She leaned from the bed and filled a glass. Alan drank and wiped his mouth with his hand.

"That's good wine you keep for your company."

She held onto his hand when he gave her the glass. He drew his hand away. "I've got to go now."

There was a pitcher of water on a stand in a corner, and a bowl. He went over and poured water and bent down and splashed it on his face.

Mitzi watched him. "Will I see you again?"

"Who knows what'll happen?"

He threw more water on his face.

There was a loud knock at the door.

"That will be Borisov," Mitzi said.

She sat up and put her legs over the side of the bed and slipped into her gold sandals. She drew a quilted black negligee over her shoulders and went to the door.

She opened it and Borisov was not there. Two men in Japanese uniforms were standing there.

They pushed Mitzi aside and came into the room.

Alan looked up with his cupped hands full of water.

A lieutenant with a drawn automatic led the way. He was a short stocky man wearing a khaki uniform and a peaked khaki cap and high leather boots. He had a round heavy-jowled face, with a flat broad nose and full lips and a thin black mustache.

The other was a steel-helmeted foot soldier, taller than the officer, and thinner. He came into the room holding his bayoneted rifle before him at the ready.

The officer stopped just inside the door. He motioned to the soldier and the other man crossed the room and stood beside Alan with his bayonet leveled at him.

The officer said, "Sorry have to do this, but must look for snipers."

He smiled, with his lips drawn back from his uneven brown teeth. It was an unnatural smile and it pulled his thin mustache up at the sides, stiffly. He turned his head and looked at Mitzi and his eyes narrowed.

Alan looked at Mitzi and the water trickled through his fingers into the bowl.

Mitzi was staring, wide-eyed, at the Japanese officer. The blood had drained out of her face and her cheeks were startlingly white against her rouge. She stood

perfectly still and held the neck of her negligee tight against her white throat.

The officer looked at her, grinning. He looked down to where the negligee didn't meet in the front and her legs showed. "No need to be frightened," he said.

Alan grew suddenly angry. "Take your God-damn slant eyes off that girl and get the hell out of here quick!" he shouted.

He started forward, drying his hands on the front of his shirt. The Japanese officer turned quickly and said, "Remain where you are." The grin had disappeared from his face.

The soldier prodded Alan with the bayonet. He felt a trickle of blood running down the small of his back. "Take that damn thing out of my back!"

He ducked and reached back and grabbed the gun and pulled hard. He struggled with the Japanese soldier. The officer didn't shoot because they were twisting and turning as they fought for the gun. Instead he turned the gun in his hand and stepped forward and raised it over his head. Alan saw him raise it and tried to keep out of its way. But the soldier managed to force him around with his back turned and the Japanese officer brought the gun down hard on the back of Alan's head.

Alan went down and blood gushed from his head and formed a pool on the floor. Mitzi put her hand up to her mouth. But she made no sound.

The two Japanese stood there and looked at the blood. Then the officer turned and looked at Mitzi. "Sorry," he said, "that this must occur." He stood there looking at her and the hard lines went out of his face. He smiled again awkwardly. "Regret that you must see this."

He started toward her and his brown teeth were showing between his thick lips. Mitzi watched him and did not make any sound.

He stood in front of her, grinning. He flicked aside the front of her robe with his gun. "Will have woman now," he said.

Mitzi felt the cold steel of the gun on her flesh. She spoke now. She said, "Take your filthy hands off me and get out of here." The sound of her voice gave her strength and she said again, "Get out of here and take that stupid dog with you."

But the Japanese didn't move. He waved his gun toward the soldier and the soldier came forward and pressed his bayonet into Mitzi's stomach.

She took a half-falling step backward. She caught herself and the bayonet dug again into her flesh. She

shrank backward again and the little Japanese officer followed her toward the bed.

At the side of the bed the soldier raised the bayonet and prodded her breasts. She fell back over the bed and the dark robe fell open. The soldier put the point of the bayonet at her throat and the Japanese officer stood over her. She tried to struggle up but the bayonet cut into her throat.

The squat little officer bent over her. She fought him, with the sharp point of the bayonet at her throat. The soldier laughed a queer gurgling laugh and Borisov heard the laugh as he came to the door of the room.

The Russian looked into the room. Then he came in with a great roar of rage. The soldier looked up but he looked up too late.

Borisov fired three shots from his heavy revolver and the bullets ripped through the khaki shirt of the soldier. He fell forward and his weight, as he fell, drove the bayonet through Mitzi's white throat.

Borisov screamed, "Mother of Christ, look what you have done!"

He looked at Mitzi lying nude on the bed with the blood spurting from her throat and running down over her breasts. A red film of rage came over his eyes

and he did not see the Japanese officer getting up from the bed.

The little brown man stood at the side of the bed with his face flushed, tugging at the automatic which had become twisted in his belt.

Borisov saw him then. He dropped his revolver and lunged forward and his hands closed around the little officer's neck.

The Japanese fought but his face slowly grew purple as Borisov tightened his grip. His squinty eyes bulged and his mouth opened, gasping. His arms fell to his sides and there was a sharp snapping sound in his neck. Then he was limp in the grasp of the Russian.

He hung there like a doll in Borisov's hands and Borisov shook him, making guttural animal sounds in his throat.

Finally he flung the dead Japanese on the floor and stepped over the uniformed body and bent to pick up the revolver he had thrown on the floor. He put it back in its holster. He went to the bed and drew the sheet up over Mitzi, covering her face. Then he lifted Alan from the floor and put him over his shoulder and went out of the room.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE street was deserted where before at this time of day it had been crowded and filled with the sound of voices and the noise of traffic and of the unboarding of shops. There was no sound except for that of faint firing, to the west.

Borisov stood staring about him, with Alan on his shoulder. At the curb was the military motorcycle of the two Japanese. It was the only vehicle to be seen on the street.

Borisov looked at its broad brown leather seat and sidecar and thought, Those bastards will have no further use for that. He put Alan into the seat where the Japanese officer had ridden and put his head forward so that it rested on his knees.

He looked at the wound where the thick blood was coagulating and matting in the short black hair at the back of Alan's head and knew that something must be done about the wound soon. But there was no time to do anything now.

He got into the driver's seat and stepped down on

the starter pedal and turned the throttle on the handle bar. The motor sputtered, then roared, the noise echoing in the silent street. Borisov shook his head and thought, That noise is enough to wake all the dead of Shanghai. He drove away fast toward the west.

The sound of firing grew louder as they neared the western edge of the city and Borisov knew it would be impossible to go through on the main road because of the fighting. He turned back and drove through the narrow cobblestone streets of the Yangtzepoo industrial quarter and skirted along the edge of the Whangpoo with the throttle of the motorcycle open and the staccato roar of the motor shattering the stillness of the morning.

He reached a bend in the Whangpoo and turned into a narrow, muddy, twisting road that led out of the city to the south and west. The motorcycle bumped and bounced as it splashed along through the mud.

Alan's head bobbed on his knees. As he opened his eyes and slowly, painfully sat erect, Borisov looked anxiously at him. "I am sorry to have to do this," he said, "but it is the only thing."

They drove fast along the rough road and left the city behind, then came into flat rolling farmland where they could not hear the sound of the guns.

There were broad flooded rice fields on each side of the road where Chinese workers stood with their blue cotton trousers rolled up to their knees and their big broad-brimmed straw hats protecting them from the sun. The war had not reached them and they looked up and were startled as the motorcycle passed on the road.

Alan put both his hands up and held his head. Borisov saw him and said, "I think it is safe now and we can do something about that wound." He stopped the motorcycle and lifted Alan out of the seat and put him down in the damp grass under a tree at the side of the road.

There was a clear stream near by that fed into the rice fields. Borisov knelt beside the water and cupped his hands and filled them. He came back and poured the water on the wound. Alan winced. "That hurts like hell," he said.

"Yes. That is truly a wound."

Borisov went back for more water and then he looked at the motorcycle. "There should be a dressing in that vehicle," he said.

He went over and lifted the seat in the sidecar and looked underneath. He came back with his arms loaded with the full Japanese kit. He sat down on the

grass beside Alan. "It was most thoughtful of them," he said, "to leave us these things." He opened the kit and took out medical dressings and scissors, and two tins of beef. "Look, we will eat," he grinned.

Then he took the scissors and dressing and bent over Alan and dressed the wound in his head. He worked quickly and expertly. Alan gritted his teeth. When Borisov finished Alan propped his head up on his hand. "It feels better," he said. "You should be a doctor."

Borisov had his knife out, prying open a tin of the beef. "In Russia," he said, "it is a part of the training."

He dug a square of the beef out of the tin, speared it with his knife and handed it to Alan. Then he put his hand in the tin, broke off a big chunk and crammed it in his mouth. He made a wry face. "It is dry," he said, with his mouth full. "Even their beef is not good."

He reached down in the front of his sweater and brought out the big flask. He unscrewed the top and turned the flask up and drank heartily. "Here," he said, handing Alan the flask. "This will wash down that garbage."

Alan drank, and the warmth of the vodka gave him

strength. The throbbing in his head eased. "What happened to Mitzi?" he asked.

Borisov looked away and didn't reply. Alan looked at him and knew Mitzi was dead.

He lay down on the grass and closed his eyes. He could see Mitzi dancing and he could see Mitzi in the canopied bed in her room. He tried to think of her dead, but there had been so much of life in her that he couldn't.

He thought of the Japanese officer looking at her, with the gun in his hand, and his thick lips drawn back over his ugly brown teeth, grinning at her.

He sat up and said, "When are we going to get into this fight in a business way?"

Borisov looked at him, his face serious. "Soon. Soon. I hope soon."

They were silent and Borisov flipped the butt of his cigarette into the stream by the road.

They finished the beef and Borisov wiped his hands on his sweater and wiped his mouth on its sleeve. He looked across at Alan. "How does your head feel?"

"Better."

"It will be all right soon. I am very good as a doctor."

Borisov spat and leaned back against the tree. He

gave Alan a cigarette and lighted one for himself and blew out rings of the smoke. Thoughtfully he took off his beret and rubbed his hand over his hair. "I spent two years in the medical corps in Russia. It was very interesting work."

"I guess it is," Alan said. "I've never tried it."

"You should. You would like it." He turned the flask up and drank. "They are very thorough in the medical corps. One has to do all things before he is through, even delivering babies."

Alan laughed. "I can't picture you as a midwife."

Borisov spat again. "It is nothing to laugh at. I have helped many women give birth."

"They were probably your women. That's service."

Borisov shook his head. "No, I did not have occasion to do that for my women. I am glad I did not. It is not a pretty thing. But the infants! They are something."

He was silent, smoking.

Then he said, "Everyone is well trained in Russia. It is not like here. Even the women are trained. They are strong. They make better soldiers than some of the men."

Alan reached for the flask. "I know all about it," he said, taking a drink. "You've told me before."

"But it is true. They are thorough in Russia. They instruct you in how to treat wounds and they instruct you in how not to get wounds in the head."

"Go to hell," Alan said. "How'd you get that scar on your face?"

The Russian rubbed his scarred cheek. "Shaving," he said. "Here, hand me that flask. I am dying of thirst."

Alan laughed. Borisov drank and blew rings of his smoke. Alan lay on his side, plucking at the grass under the tree and watching the Chinese farmers at work in the rice fields. It was quiet and warm in the sun.

Finally Borisov said, "How did you get the wound?"

"The Japs made me mad. What happened to them?"

"They are dead." He did not elaborate. But he grew serious. "That temper of yours will get you in trouble."

"Go to hell. I like my temper."

"No, I mean it. You are constantly losing your temper and some day when you do you are going to get killed. It is all right to lose your temper but it is well when it happens to have a gun in your hand."

"Yes, Father Borisov."

"No, I mean it. You lost your temper in Nanking and almost got killed by von Frisch. You did the same last night and almost got shot. You did it again today and got a wound in the head. That is a bad kind of temper to have and you should do something about it."

He wagged his head and made a clucking sound in his throat. "You should do something about it or you should carry a gun. One would think you a child the way you go about losing your temper and not having a gun. Here, I will give you a gun."

He reached down and unbuckled the gun from his belt and put it on the grass beside Alan. "After this," he said, "see that you wear that when you get into trouble. I am tired of having you get into trouble with no gun."

Alan stretched his legs out on the grass. "Thanks. But what'll you do yourself?"

"I will get something better." Alan got to his feet and stood looking out over the rice fields.

Borisov got up and they stood together, watching the farmers at work.

"It's peaceful here," Alan said.

"Yes. But we had better get on. It will not remain peaceful."

Alan picked up Borisov's gun and buckled it onto his belt. Borisov went to the motorcycle and settled himself on the driver's seat. Alan got into the side-car. "Where do we go from here?" he asked.

The Russian shook his head, frowning. "To Nanking, I guess. I cannot think of anything else to do except to go there and wait. Now that this has happened at Shanghai I do not think the Germans will be staying long. I hope not. I am tired of waiting."

Alan thought of Christine. "I won't be just waiting," he said. "I have something to do in Nanking."

Borisov was still scowling in thought. Finally he said, "I do not think Nanking can be held. The Germans have built something they call a Hindenburg Line in front of Nanking, but I do not think it will hold. The troops are tired after this beating at Shanghai and they still do not have planes. They may hold out a month but not more than that. Then Nanking will be lost and I am sure the Germans will go."

Alan sat in the seat and rubbed the back of his head gingerly. "I hope you're right. I need a job."

"After the Germans are gone," Borisov said, "Chiang will turn to Russia for help. Do you know what that means?"

"A job, I hope."

"Yes, you will get a job. We will get arms then, and planes. I will need you with me to handle the planes. You did not do combat flying for very long, but you did it as if you were born to do it. I have been thinking that since Liang is gone I would like to have you with me."

Alan was silent a moment. "That sort of job is worth dough," he said.

Borisov looked around. There was an earnestness in his big homely face. "Yes, dough," he said. "The cost does not matter. That will be arranged. I want you with me."

Alan looked at the face of the Russian and suddenly felt a warmth that had nothing to do with money. "Outside of Liang," he said, "there's no one I'd rather be with."

"Then that is settled."

Borisov reached around and they shook hands. The Russian sat there, with his legs spraddled out and his feet on the ground at the sides of the motorcycle and his hands holding the front of the leather seat between his legs.

"Besides the planes," he said, frowning, "we will need fliers. Americans and Russians. I do not know why it is, but the Chinese are not good as fliers."

"It's because they don't work," Alan said. "They're good soldiers but when they get in the air they're no good. They learn to fly quickly, but after they can get a plane in the air they think that's all they need to know. Flying's a new thing to them. They take a plane up and fly it and have a swell time. But they won't take time to learn how to fight. When they get in a fight it's too bad. I know, I've flown with them."

Borisov nodded. "I know, too. I have seen them. But I have seen you fly, too, and I know you can teach them. If you have a fault it is that temper of yours. I am afraid you will get angry and reckless in the air."

Alan laughed. "Not when I'm flying for dough. This isn't my fight."

"Just the same, be careful not to get mad. Aside from that you are good. All of the Americans I have seen know how to fly. And the Russians are good. I will see that Russia sends pilots and planes and some more pilots will come in from America, I am sure. I will leave it to you to do something with them."

"I'll do something."

"Yes, you will. Come, let us drink."

Borisov took the flask out of his sweater again and they drank. Then the Russian started the motor and they drove forward along the road to Nanking.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THEY bounced along the rough road in silence.

Alan grew drowsy in a feverish sort of way and as his head bobbed and rolled he thought of Christine waiting in the hospital at Nanking. He hadn't thought about her a great deal before this, but now her face bore in on him like a face in a persistent garbled dream. Her expression kept changing, and he saw her laughing, then frightened, then angry, and then he was sitting with her again on the steps in Tazang, kissing her, and his heart raced crazily. Other scenes ran through his mind like drunken dreams; things that hadn't happened but that might soon happen. The pain in his head pierced through his dream and he remembered again that Christine had been hurt too. He felt annoyed and thought thickly, She's a hot little bitch if she'd let herself go. I hope she gets well in a hurry.

But by the time the motorcycle jounced into the outskirts of Nanking he was too tired and sick to think of a woman. His head ached and throbbed as they drove into the capital in the hot midday sun.

Long lines of refugees still moved through the streets. The sidewalks were crowded with grim-faced Chinese officials, nurses and soldiers back from the front, Boy Scouts and government employees in gray-blue Chungshan uniforms. Hotels and restaurants and gaily decorated movie houses were jammed, and Alan thought that the streets looked more like those of a gigantic carnival than of a city preparing for siege.

Borisov cursed as they rode along slowly. He stopped, finally, in front of the ancient Bridge House Hotel.

"We will stay here," he said.

They went inside. Borisov engaged a room and they went upstairs.

There were twin beds in the room, and Alan lay down on one of them. "Well," he said, "what comes next?"

Borisov stood at the window, staring down at the crowds in the streets. "There is nothing to do now," he said, "but wait."

His face was serious. He came over and sat down on the side of the other bed, rubbing his chin. "It would not do any good for me to go to Chiang now. There would only be trouble. He is committed to the defense of Nanking and I could not dissuade him.

There is only one thing to do, and that is to wait until he gets his bellyful of the Germans. I do not think it will be long."

He shook his head. "Von Frisch will fail here as he failed at Shanghai. You cannot stop airplanes and tanks with masses of troops. It will be all over here soon and after that there will be no more reckless defenses. We will fight then as we should have fought from the first. But until then there is nothing for you and me to do."

"I'm glad of that," Alan said. "I couldn't do anything anyway." He stifled a groan.

Borisov stood up, pulling his sweater off over his head, and caught the big flask as it fell out of the sweater. He drank, then put the flask on Alan's bed. "Try some of that," he said. "It will make you feel better. I am going to get a bath and a shave."

He went into the bathroom and Alan heard him splashing in the tub, trying to sing. He sang in Russian and Alan couldn't understand the words, but he did know that the song wasn't intended for a voice such as Borisov's. He grimaced as the Russian's voice rose and fell in a horrible discord. "For God's sake," he called, "stop that vile noise!"

But Borisov didn't hear.

Alan reached down for the flask and drank the last of the vodka. It was hot in the room. He lay back on the bed. It felt pleasant and soft, but his muscles ached from the rough ride in the sidecar and he still felt sick from the throbbing in his head. He lay with his eyes closed, piecing together the flight from Shanghai, and then he remembered Mitzi.

He could still see her face, smiling at him, and he could still see the terror in it when the Japanese came into the room. He put his arm over his eyes, trying to forget about her, and at first he didn't notice the faint hum of motors far overhead.

But the sound swiftly grew into a thundering roar and Alan swung his legs off the bed and went to the window and saw the planes coming in.

There were two formations of big twin-engined bombers and they dipped out of the clouds and swept down majestically, their wings bright in the sun. Squadrons of fighters hovered near them as they descended. For a time there was no other sound but the roar of the motors of the Japanese planes.

Then from the waterfront an antiaircraft battery spoke and white puffs of smoke appeared in the sky.

One after another the Chinese guns opened up.

They sent up a terrific barrage and the concussion from the big guns shook the air.

Borisov got out of the tub and came to stand beside Alan, naked and dripping. "So it has started," he said.

They stood there and watched Chinese fighter planes climbing up from Nanking's big airdrome. They rose one at a time, then in pairs. Alan counted ten planes climbing and he kept waiting for more. But no others appeared.

He said, "They still have a chance if they get above the bombers and keep the sun at their back. If they don't it'll be murder."

He strained his eyes upward, watching them climb, but they didn't use the sun to shield their attack.

Instead they drove headlong into the big Japanese planes from below and one after another they peeled off and spun earthward trailing flame.

Alan watched them go down and pounded the window sill angrily. "Damn it to hell, there's no sense in that kind of flying!"

"No," Borisov said. "It is crazy. They need to be taught. That will be part of your job."

Alan didn't reply. He stood motionless at the window, watching the bombers sweep over the airdrome,

trying to think straight. What's it to you, he told himself, they're just a bunch of Chinks getting shot up because they can't fly. But he couldn't shake off the sick feeling that came when he saw the fighters going down.

The bombers were working methodically, circling over the city. Great fires were burning. The flames sent up visible sheets of shimmering heat. The tinder-like straw huts of the poor in Hsiakwan, along the Yangtze, were ablaze. Fire-fighting equipment raced about, but Alan could see that there was no chance of escape for the people in Hsiakwan. Most of those who remained were too old or feeble to leave and they died in the flames that destroyed their huts.

Near the heart of the city a big bomb scored a direct hit on the front of a theater, caving in its massive façade. Alan could hear the screams that rose from under the great stones. The sound mingled with the shrieks of the sirens on the fire-fighting trucks and the clanging bells of rescue cars.

Gray-uniformed girls of Madame Chiang's China Youth Movement got out of the cars and dug into the smoldering edges of the rubble.

Throngs of Chinese stood in the streets wailing. Their cries rose above the screams that came from under the heaps of stones.

Alan felt a sudden unaccountable urge to go out and help. He wheeled from the window, then abruptly stopped. My God, he thought, maybe they got Christine too.

He stood there, tense, his fists clenched. Then he went over and threw himself face down on the bed. Well, he thought, if she's dead it's too late to do anything now. To hell with the Chinks. They don't matter. They're nothing to me. Hell, I'm tired.

He lay for a long time with his eyes closed and finally he drowsed feverishly again. In his dreams this time he saw both Christine's and Mitzi's faces. They blurred crazily until he couldn't tell them apart.

When he awoke it was dark and he was drenched with sweat. The lights were on in the room and Borisov was sitting in an armchair by the bed eating a sandwich.

Alan sat up and Borisov looked at him, shaking his head. "I was beginning to think you had died." He went to the dresser and filled a tumbler with vodka. There were two rows of bottles on the dresser top.

Alan said, "I see you've put in supplies for the siege."

"The important supplies." Borisov came back to the bed and handed Alan the drink. "We also have

clothes." He sat down and waved his hand toward the dresser.

Alan could see a stack of khaki trousers and shirts in an open drawer. "My God!" he said. "How'd you do that?"

Borisov winked. It was a ponderous wink and it made his face comical. "I had words with the keeper of the supplies. How is your head?"

Alan put his hand up gingerly. "Better."

Borisov sat rubbing his chin, looking severe. "You know something?" he said. "I have been thinking that that blow on the head may have been a good thing. It may have knocked some sense into you. It may even make you intelligent."

"Go to hell," Alan said.

Borisov put his head back and roared. Then he drank more of the vodka.

Alan got off the bed and took some of the clothes out of the dresser. He looked back at the Russian. "You'd better try to get sober. We've got a date."

"A date?" Borisov's face brightened. "I will be ready."

Alan went into the bathroom and bathed and dressed in the fresh clothes. He felt better and came out of the bathroom whistling.

Borisov was stretched full-length on one of the beds with his head propped up on the pillows, drinking vodka. Alan shook him. "Get up, you great lazy ox."

Borisov grumbled, but he got off the bed. He went to the dresser and filled the flask from one of the bottles and put it inside his sweater.

"You won't need that where we're going," Alan told him.

"I need that wherever I go," Borisov said. "Where are we going?"

"To the hospital, to see the girl that got shot."

A slow evil grin spread over Borisov's face. "Then of course I will take it. She will need some too."

"Don't look like that, you dirty bastard. This isn't your woman."

Borisov eyed him waggishly. "That is only because she has not met me. I will remedy that."

"You lay off her," Alan said. "If anybody gets her drunk it'll be me. You try fooling with this girl and I'll beat hell out of you."

Borisov roared with laughter and they left the hotel and walked through the chill autumn night to the hospital.

Its beds had been filled by the afternoon's raid, and

the wounded were stretched out in rows on the hall floors. Everywhere there was the sickening odor of blood.

Sweating doctors and nurses, their white uniforms smeared with red, worked over the wounded. They worked quickly, passing on when there was no chance of saving a life.

Alan recognized the bobbed-haired Chinese nurse who had taken care of Christine. He called to her and she hurried over to where he and Borisov stood near the door. She looked exhausted. There were streaks of blood on her face and hands. She brushed her hair back with her wrist. "You will have to forgive my appearance," she said. "As you can see, we are busy." She waved her hand toward the long human rows on the floor.

Alan said, "The girl I brought here—how is she?"

"She is quite weak from the loss of blood. But the wound itself is not bad. She will get well. She is more fortunate than most of these."

"Can I see her?"

"No, it would not be well. Not so soon. Tomorrow, perhaps. She is sleeping now; we have given her opiates." A doctor shouted to her and she turned away hastily. "I am sorry, I must go back to my work."

They stood watching her kneel again to the wounded.

"Well," Borisov said. "I guess we will go home."

He started away, but Alan pulled him back. "To hell with that," he said. "I'm seeing her now."

"But——"

"Nobody'll notice in this madhouse. Come on."

He walked quickly between the rows of Chinese. Borisov followed him. Alan stopped at the door of the room where he had taken Christine. "This is it," he said. "Come on, there's a light in it."

He pushed back the door. Christine was asleep, but she awoke as he stepped in. She saw him and her face lighted up in a drugged sort of way. "Alan . . ." she whispered. "Alan . . ."

She tried to smile. Weakly she put out her hand. She looked pale and sick but better than when he had left her. Her hair had been combed and it lay in soft golden waves about her face on the pillow. Her gray eyes were drowsy but clearer and there was a little color in her full lips.

"Didn't you think I'd come back?" Alan said. He took her hand and smiled down at her.

Borisov stood watching, holding his beret in his hands. He cleared his throat finally. "Have you forgotten that I am here?" He came forward and put his

hand on Alan's shoulder. "So. You have been keeping this from me?" He bowed toward the bed. "I am Borisov, since my friend has no manners."

Christine smiled up at him. "I'm glad . . . you . . . came too."

The Russian stood looking at her, twisting his beret in his hands. At last he turned to Alan. "I am not used to this kind of woman," he said.

Alan looked at him in surprise. Then he forgot Borisov and thought only of Christine because there was an excitement rising in him. It was a strange and yet a familiar excitement, a curious feeling that he had known before, sometime or other, yet it seemed a sensation that had nothing to do with Christine or with any woman.

He stood gazing at the girl in the bed, still without speaking.

Borisov shook his elbow lightly. "It is rude to stare at a lady," he said. "I do not know what has become of your manners."

Alan roused himself and managed a laugh. "Christine," he demanded, "what do you think of this big Russian ox?"

She smiled. "I think he's nice . . . but he's so enormous he scares me."

Borisov wagged his head sadly. "That is what I do to all women."

Alan sat down on the bed. "Don't believe him. He's had hundreds of women."

Borisov made a clucking sound in his throat. "Ah, possibly, long ago. But now I am too busy for that. Even today I have been very busy. I had to kill two Japanese, personally, and I had to rescue your friend because he was stupid and got hit in the head."

Christine looked up quickly at Alan, her drowsy eyes clearing. "You've been hurt?"

"Just a scratch."

"It is more than a scratch," Borisov said. "It is a bad wound. It is that temper of his! He is constantly getting into stupid fights." He clapped his great hand down on Alan's shoulder. "He has Irish blood and I think that is the cause of his temper. It is bad blood and some day he will get angry when he is flying, and it will get him in real trouble. Someone should do something about that temper of his before it is too late. Do you know of anyone who could?"

Christine gazed into the Russian's big rugged face with its heavy black brows and fierce eyes that were kindly now. "I like you very much," she said. "I'll do something about him. But only to please you."

“Good!” said Borisov. “And now I will go, so that you can begin.” He took her hand in his huge one and pressed it gently. “Good-by. I hope you are soon recovered.”

“I will be,” she smiled.

Borisov turned away and Alan walked with him into the hall. They stood outside Christine’s door as Borisov put on his beret.

“I’ll be home pretty soon,” Alan said. “Don’t drink all the vodka.”

“Yes, you must not stay long,” Borisov told him seriously. “She is still weak. Stay ten minutes—no more.” He started off, then turned back. “Be careful of her,” he said, earnestly. “I mean not only of her health. I mean of *her*. She is not what you think. She is a lady. If you are not careful someone might get hurt.”

Alan gave him a shove. “Get on back to your vodka. You couldn’t tell a saint from a whore.”

CHAPTER NINE

ALAN went back into the room. Christine was propped up on one elbow looking at him with a strange expression.

He stood beside her bed, looking down at her. He had meant to sit on the bed, but now that Borisov was gone he suddenly felt uncomfortable, a little embarrassed, and could think of nothing to say.

"Would you rather I left too?" he asked her.

The tightness in her face did not ease. "No. I want you to stay."

Alan forced a laugh. "You don't look very glad I came back."

"I didn't want you to come back," she said.

He stood staring at her and felt an angry warmth spread around his ears. "Then I'd better go."

"No. Sit down. I said I wanted you to stay."

Alan sat down in the chair. He sat stiffly and didn't pull it toward the bed. Christine's eyes were still on his face, thoughtful, neither friendly nor unfriendly. She didn't speak. Alan shifted a little and felt the warmth reach his temples.

"Look," he said, "I don't want to waste your time or mine——"

"I didn't want you to come back but I wanted you to," she said.

He looked at her eyes and didn't answer.

She asked quietly, "Can't you understand that?"

"No. Why didn't you want me to?"

"Because I don't like you."

A high screaming came through the continuous moaning sounds from the hall. Christine shuddered and said, "Shut the door."

Alan rose mechanically. His face was hot and he kept hold of the doorknob, undecided. He glanced back at her. She had closed her eyes and tears were squeezing between her long lashes. She put her hand out toward him blindly, without opening her eyes.

"Please sit down. Please. I didn't mean to say that. I——"

"But you meant it. It's what you think."

"I—I don't know. Oh, Alan, I don't know what I think. I only know today's been horrible and I've been scared and lonely and I'm glad you've come back. Please stay. Please don't leave me now."

Alan sat down on the bed and took her hand. "I

won't. Never mind about what you said. I know you've had a rough day."

She kept her eyes closed and lay very still and he saw that she was trembling. Her hand held his with a tight strength. She whispered, "You'll think I'm crazy—after what I said. But having you here now at last is almost more than I can bear——"

Alan clasped both of his hands around hers. "I'm glad I'm here too. Stop worrying about what you said."

Excitement was rising in him. The curious excitement that he couldn't identify. But he noticed how pale and tired she was, lying there with her eyes closed and with the tears caught in her lashes.

"The nurse told me not to come in," he said.

"I know—the doctor told me this morning I couldn't see you if you came. I lay here and tried to scheme how I could manage to distract their attention—if you did come." A faint smile touched her lips and faded quickly. "But I really didn't scheme the raid."

"They'll probably run me out in a minute or two."

"No. They're much too busy. They've forgotten all about me now."

"They think you're doped from the stuff they gave you."

"I was. When they gave it to me I really slept at first. Then I woke and kept drowsing and waking, drowsing and waking. I heard the raid and then the people being brought in moaning and screaming. I knew what it was, but it was all foggy and unreal like a bad dream—a nightmare. I was still dopey when you came. So woozy I could hardly talk. I guess you noticed. But it's worn off pretty well now. I just feel weak and helpless."

"Just lie still."

"That's all I can do, but it's terrible not to be able to get up and go help. I'm a coward to keep you here. I ought to let you go out and help."

"I'm no doctor," Alan said.

"No, but anybody can hold things and obey directions."

"I am holding something." He lifted her hand. "Stop worrying. Let the sawbones and the nurses do the dirty work. That's what they're paid to do."

Her eyes had come open and he saw their pupils spread into the gray. "Stop," she said. "I can't stand to hear you talk like that."

Her hand tugged a little, limply, then lay motionless on his knee. She turned her face away.

"I'm sorry," Alan said automatically.

"Oh, never mind." Her voice had gone listless and very tired. "I don't care what you say. You're only somebody I didn't even know yesterday morning." She lay without moving. Then she said with her voice higher and choked, "Oh, why did you have to say it? I'd almost forgotten——"

Alan brought her hand up quickly and laid his face against it. "I'm sorry, Christine. Borisov's right, I'm stupid. I always say the wrong thing. Please try to forget again, will you?"

She whispered, "Yes. I'll try. Talk to me. Tell me what you did last night. Oh, your wound. I'd forgotten that! *I'm* selfish and heartless. How did you get it? Who gave it to you?"

She drew her hand away and touched his head with both hands, searching gently, her eyes dark with concern.

Alan turned his head around. "There it is. That's all it is. It's not bad now. Borisov dressed it."

"But how did you get it?"

"A couple of Japs caught up with us. Borisov killed them and we got away on a motorcycle."

Christine shuddered. "Don't talk about it after all. Tell me—things about you. About you several years ago. In the States. Where did you go to college? Did

you play football? Did you have lots of girls? What kind of girls? No, just the football. *Did* you?"

"Yes." Alan laughed at her softly. "But I'd rather you told me about you."

"Where did you go to college?"

"Williams. What's your last name?"

"Kennedy. What did you do before you learned to fly?"

"Sold bonds for my uncle. Then the depression came and I flew away from it. Why were you all alone when I met you?"

She didn't reply.

Alan took her hand again. "You're too tired to talk."

"No, I'm not. I want to. I'll tell you. Because if I do you'll understand—" she was speaking slowly, jerkily—"why I hate what I hate in you."

Alan sat waiting quietly, watching her face. "Go ahead," he said when she stayed silent. "I want to hear."

She sighed and closed her eyes again. At last she said, "You hate Neill, don't you?"

"I hate weaklings."

"Then you'll hate me."

"You're no weakling!"

"I am. About everything. I was especially about him. In—in every way."

He waited, but he had to prompt her again. "Go on."

She turned her face from him, toward the wall. Finally she turned back and her gray eyes looked at him steadily while she talked.

"It began a long time ago, while Dad was alive. Mother was dead. Dad was a medical researchist, but he was fed up on his work in the States and had always wanted to specialize in oriental diseases. His closest friend—Oliver Neill—lived in Shanghai, and wrote to urge him to come out to China and get started on his real work. So Dad and I sailed, and all the way on the trip Dad talked of nothing but Neill—reminiscing and looking forward to seeing him again. He was devoted to Neill. I got tired of hearing the man's name. Then we got here and I met him."

She drew her breath and was silent a moment.

"I saw why Dad loved him. I fell in love with him right away. Nothing like that had ever happened to me. I was twenty and had never been in love before. I guess I showed pretty much the way I felt about him. I couldn't help it. So he made love to me, with his wife right there. I fought against him and against the way

I felt. He had three darling kids that I adored and so did he. He told me he loved me and hadn't cared for his wife for years but he couldn't leave her because he was afraid of losing the children. He begged me to love him. There were ways we could have worked it to be away together and I almost gave in, but I didn't. We were there two months because Dad had a spell of fever and couldn't get started on his work. But finally he was ready and I was thankful to be going. He was going into the interior and had meant to leave me with the Neills, but I begged him to take me—I said I wanted to help in his work. He finally agreed, though he knew it was dangerous. He always gave me my way."

"I can understand that," Alan said.

"I don't mean to make him sound weak. I wish I were one-tenth as strong as he was. He just gave me my way because he loved me. Mother was gone and I was the only thing of his own that he had left to love, besides his work. So I went with him. And I was happy, except when I kept remembering Neill. Dad and I had a wonderful time working in strange out-of-the-way places. That's when I learned to love China and the Chinese people. We worked hard all day and at night we'd sit together in the dark and talk about

our work and about the things Dad thought. The doctors in the States hadn't thought his aims were practical, but now he was proving that they were. I was so proud of him, because the chief thing about him was that he always went ahead and did the thing he wanted to do when he knew it was right, no matter what anyone else said. I tried to apply that to my feelings for Neill, but I knew loving Neill *wasn't* right. I did my best to forget him and I really had made up my mind. But then Dad got sick."

She stopped talking. Alan could see her throat quiver. He squeezed her hand. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you talk about things that make you unhappy."

"No, it's all right. I'm getting over it now. But it seemed the world had stopped then. It happened at Changsha. We were staying at a little inn there and every morning I used to go into Dad's room and wake him and give him tea in bed. It was fun. But one day as soon as I saw him I knew he was sick. He was burning with fever and he didn't seem to know me. I was terribly scared. I got doctors but they didn't do any good. I didn't know what to do. So I wired Neill to bring a doctor from Shanghai. But before he got there Dad was gone."

"I'm sorry," Alan said, quietly.

She looked up at him, trying to keep the tears back. "Oh, Alan, I wanted to die!" She put her arm up over her eyes.

"I know. I felt that way once too."

She looked at him again. "About—your father?"

"Yes."

She reached out quickly and put her hand on his. "Oh, Alan, I'm so sorry. Do you want to tell me about it?"

"You go on with your story."

"I'd rather hear yours—if it doesn't hurt too much to tell."

"There's not much to tell." His voice was brittle. "Dad had a woman. She——"

"Your mother was dead?"

"She'd died five years before. This one was a tramp but Dad couldn't see it. He gave her everything he had, but she kept wanting more. He ran into debt." The words came out jerkily. "Then he got reckless in the air. He could do anything with a plane. He'd taught me to fly, but I'll never fly the way he could. I loved to go up with him. He was happy up there. It could make him forget his troubles. But finally it couldn't. He changed—he didn't seem to

care any more. And then one day he crashed. . . .”

He stopped talking for a minute, then went on. “No woman’s worth that. I got drunk and stayed drunk. But finally, somehow, I pulled out of it. I thought, That bitch won’t do this to me too. I sobered up and decided to make money, lots of it, and have all the things she kept him from having. And see that no one got it away from me.” He looked down at her, his jaw hard. “That’s all.”

She was staring at him, her wet eyes wide. Her hand tightened on his slowly until her knuckles whitened.

“Go on with your story,” Alan said.

She said faintly, “I wasn’t that strong.”

Some of the hardness went out of his face. “What did you do?”

After a few moments she answered. “Neill was—so kind. He helped me get through it. We had to bury Dad there. I went back to Shanghai with him—with Neill. On the way he told me his wife had left him. She’d taken their two little girls but had left him Dickie, the little boy. Neill asked me to come home with him and help take care of Dickie—he knew how I loved him—Dickie, I mean. He said we’d get married as soon as his wife got a divorce. He was awfully

unhappy about losing the little girls. I felt so sorry for him. I knew I shouldn't go to stay with him—I knew I should wait for the divorce. But he needed me. And I needed him—I didn't know where else to go. So I went home with him."

She held Alan's hand tightly. Her face had become flushed, he noticed. Her eyes were brighter, unnaturally bright. He put his hand up and touched her hair.

"What happened after that?" he asked her.

"A lot of things. I was happy at first, terribly happy. Neill was so good to me. He worshiped his son and it made him happy to see the way Dickie and I got along. We were all pals. It was pretty wonderful then. But after a while I began to find out things about Neill."

Alan looked at her more sharply. "What did you find out?"

"About his women. There were dozens of them, it seemed. I knew then why his wife had left him. It was the last straw for her when I came along. He'd let her think he'd had me, to get rid of her. It hurt when I realized that, and I nearly left him. But I didn't. I tried not to blame him for anything. I told myself he couldn't help being weak. He couldn't help being so good-looking that women ran after him. And after

his money. He had plenty of it. I didn't know then where it came from."

"But you know now?" Alan said.

"Yes, I know." She looked up, her eyes pleading with him. "Alan, I didn't know what to do when I found out the truth. I knew I should tell the police, but I *couldn't* do that to him, even then. Aside from all he'd meant to me, Dad had loved him so. It seemed it would be hurting Dad and breaking faith with him. Still I knew Dad would have done it himself. He was that strong. But I wasn't. I couldn't, I simply couldn't. I didn't know what to do. I only knew that now I was through with him—with Neill. So I left."

Alan squeezed her hand and stroked it. "And then what?"

"I just sort of drifted."

He asked gently, "Other men?"

Her chin came up. "No. There weren't. There could have been. But there weren't. Do you believe me?"

"Yes." He felt queerly glad about it.

"But I couldn't decide what to do. Then the war reached Shanghai. I was scared to death when I met you."

"Haven't you any friends here?"

"I had, but they've left China now. Even the ones I knew least."

"Why didn't you go back to the States too?"

She didn't answer. Her gaze dropped to the bed. Finally she said, "I don't know."

"I know," Alan said. "Because he's still in China."

Her eyes lifted defiantly. Their unnatural brightness made them seem to flash. "I'll never go back to him."

She closed her eyes and lay there, breathing hard.

Alan got up and stood beside the bed, looking down. He looked at the long curving sweep of her body, outlined under the sheet, and he looked at her soft golden hair and at her full rounded breasts that showed beneath the white hospital gown, rising and falling, and he thought, Whatever she is—she can do things to me.

For again he felt that strange, breathless excitement that he had never felt with any other woman, and he knew suddenly that it was the same excitement he felt when he was in the air, flying and feeling the wind in his face, and hearing the great rushing roar of the wind as he climbed reckless and free toward the sun.

CHAPTER TEN

BELOW the hotel window lorries and wagons were rolling in with the Chinese wounded. Alan turned away from watching them. Borisov sat at a desk poring over minutely detailed maps of the Chinese interior provinces. He looked calm, sitting there.

"For God's sake," Alan said, "can't we get going some way or other? I'm sick and tired of this waiting around."

The Russian did not look up. "I am tired of it too. It is not easy to wait."

The thunder of the Japanese guns kept shaking Nanking. Borisov drew a line on a map and then leaned back in his chair with his big hairy arms folded.

"We are all troubled with nerves," he said, "even von Frisch. He knows that he cannot hold out much longer here and he knows that when Nanking goes he also goes. So his nerves are beginning to crack."

He sat scowling, deep in thought. Suddenly he leaned forward and patted the gun which had been his and which was now strapped at Alan's hip. "Keep that

with you," he warned. "He is like a snake. He may strike at any moment."

Alan walked to the window again and stared down at a truck emptying more wounded outside a large tent set up in a lot. "He's more butcher than snake. He's certainly doing a job on these Chinks."

Borisov nodded. "That is so." He looked closer at Alan. "But I thought you did not take this war seriously."

"I don't take a slaughterhouse seriously. But I wouldn't like to watch the butchering."

Borisov gazed at him thoughtfully before going back to his maps.

For a time Alan watched him. Then he took his cap from a bed post. "I'm going to the hospital."

Borisov looked up at him, still thoughtfully. "Please take my regards."

The streets were deserted. The Chinese were hiding in basements and shelters. Shells from the Japanese siege guns were falling fast now. Alan could hear them whistling as they came from a long way off to explode with a rending blast. The city was growing dark.

Alan thought impatiently of Christine as he made his way to the hospital. She hadn't been getting along

as she should. She'd had a relapse after their long talk that first night and the doctors had not let him see her again for a week. Since then she hadn't been strong, but the last two days she had seemed better, he thought. Sick or well, she still did things to him. He hoped the hospital would release her soon so that he could get her out of Nanking.

He reached the hospital as a shell burst near by. He stood at her half-open door a moment before she grew aware of him, and he saw how tense and still she was lying, waiting for the next blast, her teeth tightly clenched. He stepped into the room and she turned her head quickly and raised up from her pillow as if to fling herself to meet him. The frozen look on her face was meant for a smile. Alan took two long steps and bent over the bed and pulled her tight against him with his face pressed to hers.

"It's all right, Chris. It's all right."

Her body trembled hard at first but slowly calmed in his arms. "I'm all right now," she said. "But stay holding me."

He held her tighter and smoothed her disordered hair, then laid his cheek against it. "God, it must be hell for you here alone."

"I wanted you to come but I was afraid for you to.

I couldn't bear thinking of you on those streets."

"But you knew I'd come, didn't you?"

"Yes," she whispered, and turned her mouth to his.

He kissed her and her warm mouth was quivering. He slipped his arm up behind her head and kissed her harder, exploring her lips hungrily. Another shell dropped near and her arms tightened convulsively but she didn't take her lips away.

At last she did, sighing shakily. "Oh Alan, when will they let me out of here?"

"I'll see the doctor today and tell him I'm taking you. They need your bed——"

"But where will I go?"

He hunted her mouth again. "You'll come with me."

"But—but where?"

He felt a hot breathlessness. "We'll get a house somewhere. Somewhere off from the fighting."

She didn't answer and he felt her go away from him although her body stayed rigid.

"Chris. You want to, don't you?"

He pressed her head back to see her eyes but she hid her face against his shoulder.

"Yes—yes, I want to." But her voice was queerly small.

"Then what's the matter?"

"Nothing. I said I'll go with you. If that's the way you want it. There's nothing else for me to do."

He loosened his arms around her, feeling a faint anger stir out of his bewilderment. "But damn it, you've acted as if—I thought you——"

"You thought since I did with Neill I would with you."

Slowly he let her go and got to his feet. "If that's the way you feel——"

She drew her breath. "It is—but let's not fight." She put her hands over her face. Another shell shook the hospital. "I'll go with you. It'll probably be lovely. If we live long enough." She took her hands away and looked at him with tears streaming down her cheeks. "Oh my God, how silly to mind each other's selfishness—with death this near."

Alan stood looking at her.

She put her hands up to him and choked, "Please——"

He sat down on the bed and gathered her back into his arms. She came with an almost frightening passion.

"Alan—Alan——"

He kissed her mouth and eyes and hair and pulled her gown from her throat.

There was a knock at the closed door.

Alan looked up dazedly as Christine pushed him from her. "Answer it," she whispered. "We have to."

Alan went slowly and opened the door. Father François stood there, smiling gravely. "General BorISOV told me you were here," he said. "So I followed you. I hope you do not mind? I have only a few minutes but I wanted to see you again."

Alan collected his wits. "I'm glad, Father." Lines of fatigue showed in the priest's face but there was still the same firmness in the set of his chin and his shoulders. Alan grasped his hand and led him to the bed. "This is Christine Kennedy. Chris, it's Father François."

He stood looking at both of them and again he felt the calm strength of the slender old priest.

Father François smiled down. "She is very pretty. She is a woman but she has the look of a child." Then he looked at Alan. He tugged at his straggly beard and smiled again gently. "I see that you do not think of her as a child."

Christine flushed, and the old Jesuit said contritely, "Forgive me. I did not mean to be rude."

"Oh no," Christine said, "you're not. Please, Father, sit down."

The priest sighed and obeyed. "Thank you. I welcome a chair. Just now I am very tired."

Alan cleared his throat. "You work too hard, Father."

The old man shook his head. "There is so much to be done. There is no time for rest."

"That's the way my father felt," Christine said. "It's wrong. You must rest."

Alan asked, "Are you trying to arrange a safety zone in Nanking?"

"Yes. But this time I have failed." The lines in the gentle face deepened. "I am afraid it is too late now for such projects. So many have died that now the men are like beasts as they fight. The Chinese fight blindly, trying to save their homes and their cities, and they have no time to consider humanitarian measures. And the Japanese will listen to nothing. They are insane with the spirit of conquest."

He tugged fiercely at his beard.

"It is hard to understand all this killing. It could not be if God did not will it, so there must be some purpose. But it is a hard thing to see the innocent die." He sighed and moved his thin fingers along the beads

of his rosary. "Since it must be," he said finally, "all we can do is to try to help those who suffer. There are so many wounded and homeless and hungry, so many helpless women and children, so many soldiers dying because there are not doctors and nurses to care for them all. That is the work I can do, and that is why I am here."

Alan saw that Christine was watching the priest with a strange intentness. "But you can't do all that alone, Father," she said.

Father Francois smiled faintly. "No, I cannot do it alone. But there are others who feel as I do and with them I am organizing a volunteer corps to help in the work. Many are joining us and we hope that some day there will be enough workers to take care of all those who need help."

He was silent a moment. "There is a woman with me," he went on, "who is really doing most of the work. She is an Italian, Mother Carla Helena, and she came with me from Shanghai. She is a wonderful woman. She has courage that is a marvel. She showed that at Shanghai and she has shown it since then many times. I am most fortunate to have her here with me."

He smiled again and held up the rosary in his

hand. "If it were not for these beads I would not have her with me."

Christine urged, "How is that, Father?"

"Well, she was in charge of the Sacred Heart Hospital in Shanghai. As you know, that is in the Yangtze-poo sector and some of the worst fighting was there. The Japanese soon by-passed the hospital and it was surrounded, but Mother Helena refused to come out. She said, 'There is work to do here, and I will stay until it is done.'

"So she stayed and the gunfire shattered the hospital windows and shells punctured the roof. The wounded poured in and the beds were all filled and the nuns made beds on the floor for the men. They worked day and night, but many they could not save, and for those they built coffins of wood and dug graves during the night when the planes were not flying. And when the wood was gone they dug holes for the bodies and sprinkled lime over them."

He paused and tugged at his beard. Alan saw that Christine had grown tense as she listened. Her eyes were very bright.

"Sunday came," the priest said, "and there was no one to say Mass for the nuns. Mother Helena would not let the day pass without Mass. She found an old

Chinese seeking refuge in the hospital grounds and she put him to driving the ambulance to Nantao to bring me back to say Mass. He got through somehow, but when he arrived there were bullet holes in the ambulance and he was so frightened he could scarcely speak. But he managed to tell me that Mother Helena had sent him.

"I got in the ambulance and we drove back to Shanghai and on the way we went into some of the heaviest fighting I have seen. The driver was shaking. He was wearing a scapular medal pinned to his coat and I knew he was a devout Catholic. I thought, There is only one thing that will take him through this and that is his faith. So I held my rosary up where he could see it and prayed at the top of my voice.

"We finally got there. I said Mass, and during the Mass shells were falling in the hospital compound. Afterward I insisted that Mother Helena come out, but she would not agree until I had assured her that I would see to it that all the wounded were brought out safely.

"Then we loaded the nuns in the back of the ambulance and Mother Helena got in the front with the driver and me. The old driver was so afraid by this time that even the rosary was not enough to quiet him.

Mother Helena saw this and she started to sing. The nuns in the back joined in the hymn and I held the beads up and prayed and finally the old man started.

“The trip back was worse than the one to the hospital had been. There was furious fighting all the way to Nantao. The shells fell all around us and the nuns still sang, with Mother Helena leading their song, and I kept praying as loud as I could and we got safely through to Nantao.”

Father François rose and stood by the bed, holding his beads and letting them slip through his fingers. He smiled down at Christine. “These beads brought us through safely, I know. They and the hymns of Mother Helena. She is one of the most remarkable women in the service of God.”

“She must be,” Christine said softly. “Father, I’d like to know her.”

“Perhaps you will meet her. She is here in Nanking now, at work.” He sighed. “She works day and night, with little rest. No one can stop her. I have tried. But she will not rest as she should.”

The falling of the shells had abated. Alan saw that the priest’s voice had lulled Christine. She looked peacefully drowsy. Her eyes were trying to close.

Father François laid his hand on Alan’s shoulder.

"Come," he said, "let us leave. *This* one must rest."

He pressed Christine's hand. "You do not mind that I take him away? By now I know the look of sick people. Too much excitement is not good. You are very tired."

She smiled up at him. "Yes . . . I think I can sleep now. You've done me good. Please . . . come to see me again . . . wherever I am. . . ."

Alan touched her arm. "I'll be back. After you've slept."

He didn't want to leave her but he went out with the priest. They walked together up the empty street. A shell had made a hole in it since Alan had passed and the front of a house had fallen, strewing its rubble, but no human beings were in sight.

Father François gazed at the broken house. "Apparently no one perished there. God's partiality often seems strange to us."

Alan said, "They'd probably already been killed somewhere else."

The priest looked at him keenly. "Perhaps. Would it not, though, make you more cheerful to believe that somewhere simple lives had been mercifully spared?"

Alan smiled. "My own simple life—yes."

The priest was silent. Then he said softly, "I have

held in my memory a story I have heard of a young man pleading earnestly with the Chinese leader to send aid to the simple people of Shanghai."

Alan looked at him in surprise. "It was Liang I wanted help for."

"Liang." Father François meditated as he walked. "I heard a remarkable fact today from General Borisov about a young man's loyalty in a hopeless battle. A loyalty that warmed my heart."

Alan flushed hotly but didn't answer.

Father François stopped at an intersection. "I must leave you here. I am glad we have had this half-hour."

"So am I," Alan said. His face was still flushed and he hesitated. "Look, I—I'm loafing, you know. If I could help you in your job——"

Their hands clasped tightly.

"No," the priest answered. "You will have your own job soon."

"I certainly hope so. I'm broke."

The old Jesuit gave him a curious smile and walked away, his robe swinging with calm grace. He did not look back.

Alan watched him go. Then he went slowly on down the dark street to the Chinese Officers' Club.

The bar was deserted except for two young Chinese lieutenants who were sitting at a table in a corner of the room talking in low voices. Alan sat at a table alone and drank and forgot the priest and thought about Christine.

He was still thinking of her when the Japanese bombers struck. There was one earsplitting blast, then an unnatural stillness, then a bedlam of bursting sound. Alan sat still, gripping his glass. He knew the planes must have come in very high because there had been no sound of motors before that first crash had come.

Almost at once the ghostly scream of sirens pierced the night. But their screaming was soon lost in the roar of the bombs. The lights went out in the bar. Alan could hear the two Chinese officers stumbling and cursing the enemy in the darkness. Another blast shook the building, overturning his drink. He staggered up from his chair and stood by his table, waiting and listening as the bursts came.

The planes were coming over in waves. Now and then there would be a lull and he could hear the deep drone of motors, the motors of high-altitude bombers. He crossed the room and pushed the heavy black-out curtain aside.

Whole blocks had been leveled. Fires blazed in the great gaping holes where familiar buildings had stood. Dense clouds of smoke rolled up from the flames. Through the smoke and flames Alan could see the men and women who had ventured out on the streets again when the shelling had lessened. They were running again now, crazy with fear, fighting each other to get into the underground shelters. Alan kept straining his eyes to try to see the hospital while the bombs went on crashing. This time, he thought, those bastards mean to finish the job.

But finally the planes flew away.

At last, through the smoke and the fires, he made out the bleak walls of the hospital. They were undamaged. He went back to a table and dropped down and put his head on his arms.

Once again the sirens wailed, sounding the all-clear. The lights came on in the bar and the Chinese bartender returned to his work, his round yellow face showing no sign of emotion. Alan sat still with his head on his arms. He sat there for a long time, with his fists clenched over his head. Then he heard some one enter the bar and looked up and saw von Frisch.

The German's face was dead white. Two Chinese orderlies followed him. They stood behind him at the bar as he ordered a drink. Alan looked at him and felt

a sudden overpowering rage. He thought, Yes, drink, you German son of a bitch, drink so you can't hear them dying outside.

He got up from his chair and stood beside the table unsteadily, leaning forward with his hands spread on the table top.

"Butcher," he shouted, "have you finished your work for tonight?"

Von Frisch whirled. He saw who had spoken and put his drink down on the bar and came forward, his hand on the butt of his gun.

"*Schweinehund!*" he said. "I'll kill you for that."

"Try it," Alan said. His hand rested on his own gun.

Von Frisch's eyes wavered. He shouted to his two orderlies who were standing openmouthed. "Arrest this man!" He snapped out the order.

Neither Chinese moved. Their faces went sullen.

"God damn you!" von Frisch cried. "Do as I say!"

Still the soldiers stood by the bar. Von Frisch made a faltering move toward them. Both put their hands on their automatics.

Alan started laughing. "You're through, butcher," he said. "Your guts have run out."

He turned and walked out of the bar. As he passed the Chinese soldiers he saw them grinning.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ALAN awoke to find Borisov shaking him. He opened his eyes and saw that morning had come.

He sat up. The Russian shook him again and roared at him as he sat rubbing his eyes. "Ho, now, get out of that bed! I have news!"

Borisov was standing beside the bed grinning and Alan saw the excitement in his face. Alan swung his legs off the bed. "What the hell?"

"Come, I will tell you."

Borisov strode to the table, sat down and sorted through a stack of maps. Alan followed and stood watching him. He noticed that the Russian's hands shook and that his glowing eyes were bloodshot. He looked across and saw that the other bed had not been slept in. "What's going on?" he demanded. "Where've you been?"

Borisov flourished a map. "Here, I will show you." He was still grinning, with his yellow teeth showing. "It is like this. It is as I told you. I was not here last night because I spent the night working with Chiang."

He got up and leaned back on the table, half-sitting

and swinging one leg. "Now do you understand?" He did not wait for Alan to answer. "No, you are too dense. I will speak plainly so that even you can understand. I received a message last night from Chiang, an urgent message which asked me to come at once. I went to him and do you know the first thing he said?"

He struck a match and lighted one of his long Russian cigarettes and drew on it fiercely but his eyes still wore the expression of his grin.

Alan started grinning too. "No. I can't guess."

"You are a liar. You know because it is your doing. At least what you call the pay-off is your doing. Chiang said, 'The Germans are going.' " Borisov threw his arm around Alan and squeezed him in a great bear-like hug. "Do you hear? The Germans are going!"

He threw his head back and laughed his deep rumbling laugh.

Alan laughed too and thumped him on the back. "Christ, it's about time."

Borisov pushed him away and sat down at the table again and his face became serious. "I cannot understand why you allowed that swine to live. But anyway you achieved prompt results. To lose face before Chinese soldiers is worse for him than to die."

Alan poured vodka for them both. The Russian

seized the nearest glass. "Now we have much work to do," he said, "and we must hurry." He waved his drink as he talked, splashing it. "Chiang is going at once to Hankow. He has told von Frisch that he is through with the Germans. It will be announced that they have been recalled by Berlin. Now that they have lost their face, Chiang lets them save it. That Chiang—he is a man!"

He paused and squinted his eyes reflectively, scraping the map against the beard of his cheek. "Yes, that Chiang is a man. I was fooled—even me. I thought he was doing nothing while the Germans were losing the war for him. But he was doing great things. Look, I will show you."

He spread the map out on the table. It was of southwest China, showing Indo-China and Burma. "He is a great general," Borisov said softly, bending over the map. "The Germans told him they could hold Shanghai and the coast. He allowed them to try. But he did not stake everything on it. He prepared for the situation that would exist if they failed. While the Germans were losing Shanghai he was having a road built from *here*—" he pointed to the port of Rangoon—"to *here*—Chungking."

He traced the twisting course of the road on the

map. There was a mounting excitement in his voice and eyes. Alan caught more of that excitement as the meaning of what the Russian was saying became clear. He bent over the map too.

"It is a great project," Borisov said, "and it has been accomplished secretly and with great speed. When Chiang moves, things are accomplished. He has had thousands of workers building the road and it is ready now for traffic to go through. But that is not all."

He got up from the table, spilling his drink again. "He has got arms! Do you hear?"

His voice shook and rose. Alan felt a swelling of the excitement in his chest.

"He has obtained a loan from America to buy arms and there are arms now on the way! There are tanks and big guns and planes—*planes*, do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," Alan said in an unsteady voice. "When do we start?"

Borisov clapped him hard on the shoulder. "That is the right way to talk! We start at once—*now*. There is much to be done, but Chiang and I have worked out a plan. You are to go to Hankow and wait. We called last night and reserved the Japanese Club, or what used to be the Japanese Club, for you and the fliers who will come in. You will have some Chinese fliers

to start with and I am to go to Russia and arrange for Russian fliers. And some American fliers will come in with the arms at Rangoon."

He took a swig from the bottle, forgetting his glass. "I will also arrange for Russian planes. Then we will have good fast pursuit planes and light bombers ready to fly. We will fly them in across Turkestan to Hankow. You will have these and the American planes and you will select the best of the fliers and organize them into squadrons as fast as you can. I will join you in Hankow. Chiang will be there and he will direct a retreat of the armies to Hankow and beyond Hankow if it is necessary. I think that it will be necessary to fall back as far as Chungking. But no farther."

He grabbed a second map from the table and traced the great distance from Shanghai inland to Chungking. "You see how far the enemy's lines will then be stretched? They will be stretched thin, like a strained rubber band! And they will snap as easily as that. I will take the best Chinese troops and organize them into small compact squadrons and with them I will strike at the Japanese lines and I will raise hell. You see? When I explained this to Chiang he said, 'I am sorry that we have not done this before.' And he said, 'When I was fighting to unify China the only armies I

did not defeat were the Communist armies in the north. It was because they used those same tactics.' And he said, 'There are two men who were fighting me then who are skilled in those tactics. They are General Li Tsung-jen and General Pai Chung-hsi. They are from Kwangsi and they have been fighting as a team for years. They are good. I will bring them here to assist you.' "

Borisov drew his breath and grinned at Alan. "You see now how he feels? We are friends. The past is forgotten."

He got up and poured a glassful of vodka and shoved the bottle at Alan. "There are other things too," he said, "upon which we agreed. One is that from now on there must be a policy of scorched earth as the Chinese withdraw. Everything must be destroyed, buildings, food, livestock, everything, so that nothing is left for the Japanese when they come in and they will be forced to depend more and more on their lines of supply."

"Right," said Alan, but he was waiting for Borisov to go on.

"The other thing concerns the task you must do. There will not be many planes at first and with them we will not be strong enough to attack. Therefore your

first task will be to protect the supply route from Burma along this new road. The American arms will be transported along this road to Chungking. There will not be many at first but as time passes there will be more and more and we will build up a store of arms great enough to attack and drive the Japanese out of China. But that will take time and the Japanese will not be idle while we bring in the arms. They will learn of the road soon, if they do not already know of it, and they will do everything possible to interrupt the flow of supplies. It will be your job to prevent that. Do you think it is something that you can accomplish?"

Alan finished his vodka. He put down the glass and stood up. "If you didn't think so," he said, "you wouldn't ask me to try." He was smiling.

Borisov came to him and put a great hand on his head. "Sometimes," he said, "you are not so dense."

Alan punched his chest.

The Russian went back to his maps. "Now I will study. There are still many details to decide. Do not talk to me for one hour."

"I'll make it longer than that." Alan put on his cap and went to the door.

Borisov looked up quickly. "You are going to the hospital?"

"That's right."

"Be careful of what you say. Even to her."

"Don't worry."

There was no sun and the early-morning air was cold, but it exhilarated Alan still further. The roaring of the Japanese guns surprised him. He hadn't been conscious of it while Borisov had been talking. Clouds of gray smoke from Nanking's fires rolled up against the gray sky and the city looked desolate. The Chinese, Alan knew, were fighting a hopeless fight at its gates. But thinking of the planes that would soon be coming to him kept his spirits high. He knew now how much he had missed flying. He knew too how much he wanted Christine. He thought of the soaring sensation that he always got when he was with her, and he knew that she and flying seemed to belong together in his mind. That was a strange thought. He walked faster and planned how much he could tell her of Borisov's news.

He ran up the steps of the hospital and walked quickly to her room. Her door was open. But his greeting stuck in his throat. She was up, dressed. She was sitting in the chair by the bed, wearing a navy-blue tailored suit with a short fur cape and a little fur hat dark against the gold of her hair. She had the

cape pulled around her as if she were cold sitting there. She looked very lovely, so lovely that Alan couldn't speak. But she waited for him to speak first. He went to her and turned her face up to kiss and found words.

"Where'd you get the outfit, beautiful? It's just in time. We're on our way to Hankow."

She turned her head so that his lips only grazed her cheek. "Are you going to Hankow?"

"Damn right! Chiang's kicked out the Germans. I'm going to fly again."

"Oh," Christine said. Then she said, "That's fine. Now you can make money."

Alan straightened away from her slowly. The things he had wanted to tell her and knew he couldn't tell her seemed to fade off and not to matter so much. "What did you say that for, Chris?" he asked her.

"Isn't it true?"

His eyes hardened a little. "Yes, it's true, and Christ knows I needed a job. But I thought you'd be glad. Damn it, it means we can get out of here. I thought you—I thought we'd—you said you wanted to go, didn't you?"

"I am going."

"Then what——?" He tried to pull her up to him

but she got to her feet quickly and slipped out of his arms.

"I'm not going with you." The stress fell on the last word.

Alan stared at her. "By God, you're not going out in this hell alone."

"No."

He stared at her and then tried again to take hold of her. "Chris! What's the matter with you?"

"He's come back," she said.

Alan stood still. All the excitement he had felt went away and left a cold feeling.

"He's here," Christine said. "I wrote to the hotel in Shanghai and asked them to send my clothes here. They didn't do that. He was there trying to locate me and they gave my clothes to him to bring. He brought them today."

She stepped closer to Alan and started to touch his arm, but drew her hand back. "Oh, Alan, he's so pitiful. Dickie is dead—his little boy. He was killed by a bomb—but not right away. He lived for five hours, and it's just about killed Neill. He thinks it's God's punishment to him for his—his treachery. He's drinking hard. He's going to crack terribly if nobody helps him. I've got to help him, Alan, I've got to. Dad

would have helped him now—I know he would, and so I’ve got to. Oh, Alan, if you could see him you’d understand. He needs me so desperately.”

Alan stood looking at his hands turning his cap. Well, what the hell, he thought, there are still the planes. But somehow it didn’t seem to matter so much any more that he was going to Hankow and that there were planes coming in and that he’d soon be flying.

Christine was waiting for him to say something. He looked at her, but not at her eyes. He looked at her slim arms and her breasts and at her hair and her lips that she was holding unnaturally tight against her teeth, and finally he looked at her eyes and saw the tears in them.

“I need you too, Chris,” he said.

She caught her breath but stepped back from him. “No. You don’t need anybody. Except somebody you can buy with the money that’s so important to you. You’re still the way he *used* to be—when I ran away from him. You don’t need me any more than he did then, and I couldn’t be any happier with you than I could have been then with him. You’d do the same thing he did if you got the chance. I couldn’t bear lying in your arms and knowing that. But he’s come through hell now—he’s had his punishment and he

loathes himself for what he did and he wants me to help him make up for it—to China. He still has his money and so he can. He wants to give almost all he's got—in Dickie's name——”

Her voice stopped. Then she turned her back to Alan quickly and began crying into her hands. “I’ll always want you. I hate myself for admitting it, but it’s so. But it isn’t the real you I’ll want. It’s only the you when you kiss me—that’s all. I hate the real you. And now please go. Please go, I say. Go! Go! Get out——”

Alan went out of the room and walked down the hospital corridor.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE heavy camouflaged lorries rolled out of Nanking carrying troops heading for new positions in the west.

Alan rode in one of them, sitting in front with the driver. It was cold and the soldiers huddled together in the back of the truck. They were sullen and silent. The young driver sat slumped at the wheel. Alan could see the shrapnel wound in his sallow cheek above his coat collar that was turned up against his neck. The wound was just healing and caused his mouth to pull back at the side, giving his face a perpetual sneer.

He drove hard and was silent too. Alan stared ahead and folded his arms tightly to try to keep warm. He tried not to think of Christine, but he kept thinking of her, angrily and bitterly, as the truck bounced over the hastily patched road.

He kept seeing her in Neill's arms, and kissing Neill, and with Neill on a bed, and his fingers dug into his own arms as if they were fastening on Neill's throat. He heard himself muttering and he clenched his teeth until his jaw muscles cramped.

Behind him the soldiers forced together odorously

stayed as quiet as dead soldiers. Alan had noticed that they were all very young. He thought of them now and knew that most of them had lost something too. He wondered how long it would take them to forget.

He wondered what they were thinking about and how many of them were thinking of their women, and what kind their women were. Mine was a bitch, boys, he said to them in his mind; I hope you had better luck.

He rode a long way thinking that, watching the lorry ahead roll and twist and bounce over the road. He didn't know when the change came in his thoughts, but after a while he knew he was lying to himself and that Christine wasn't a bitch and that she had only done the thing she thought was right. And he knew she had been right. Because if what she wanted was a noble guy who felt himself one with all humanity, or a man burned clean by hellfire, he couldn't have been that for her. He wouldn't even have tried.

Oh, the hell with her, he thought; when I get the planes I'll quit thinking about her. He heard planes coming then, and for a minute he forgot what kind they were.

They dipped out of the gray sky and straightened

out over the road. They were fighters, fast little naval pursuits, nine of them flying in three V echelons, but no bombers followed them down.

The driver saw them too but he didn't stop driving. He drove along with his head ducked low as the planes swooped and opened up with their guns. They flew low over the long line of trucks, strafing the troops. Several soldiers riding behind Alan cried out as the bullets ripped through the lorry's top.

The trucks kept going. The planes didn't come back. They were bound for Nanking. But the wounded men were moaning behind Alan. He turned and looked at them. The ones that were unharmed were bandaging those who had been hit, working in haste but awkwardly, unlike medical soldiers.

"Do you need any help?" Alan asked them in his bad Chinese.

"Thank you, we can manage," they replied.

The driver cursed and spoke for the first time. "It is always the planes. We are not cowards but what chance do we have when they attack from the air and we have no way to fight back?"

Alan understood most of it. "We'll have planes soon," he said.

The driver grunted skeptically and returned to si-

lence. The sounds from the back of the truck made Alan grit his teeth. He didn't look back any more. A little way ahead he could see a truck that had dropped out of line and was burning by the roadside. Its survivors were clambering into the passing trucks, and seven of them were running for the one Alan was in.

From the back of the truck a young soldier's voice called out sharply to the driver. "One has died!"

"Well, I can't help that." The driver hunched farther into his overcoat.

"But we must bury him!"

The driver laughed shortly. "How can I stop for that?"

"He is my friend!"

"I regret your grief," the driver said. "But there are many lorries in haste behind us." The men from the burning truck were tumbling in on the already wedged-in occupants. The driver's tone grew firmer and yet held its curious softness. "There is no room in here for dead men. You must throw him so that he falls clear of the road."

"But—his ancestors——"

"I cannot stop for ancestors now."

Alan turned again and looked back into the truck.

The dead soldier lay across the knees of the one who spoke, and the yellow face of the squatting boy was the color of ivory. But except for its tightness there was no expression on it. Blood was on his overcoat and on the coats of many of the rest who had not been hurt.

Two other soldiers stirred with difficulty in the crowded noxious compartment and reached for the dead man and lifted him from the boy's knees. They passed him toward the end of the truck and other hands reached and bore him to the end and the last hands lowered him outside and swung him gently to and fro, like a child being dandled, and heaved him into a field as the lorry sped on.

Alan turned back and stared ahead. The truck jounced faster and there was no more talking. But soon Alan knew by the stifled sounds in back that another soldier had died.

He kept watching the skies, waiting for Japanese bombers to come and finish the job. But the bombers, he decided, were still busy blasting Nanking. No more planes came and the lorries rolled on through the gray winter day and into the cold night, and late in the night they came into Hankow. Some turned out of line and Alan's truck stopped finally at a warehouse

that was to be their barracks. Alan climbed out and stretched his stiff legs.

"Good-by," he said to the driver.

"Good-by." There was no expression on the fellow's face except the sneer from his scar, but Alan felt that each of them would remember the other if they ever met again.

The soldiers were getting out and removing the wounded carefully.

"Good luck," Alan said to them in English, forgetting that many of them wouldn't understand. He had a moment's strange desire to say good-by to the boy who had lost his friend. But instead he walked off hurriedly into the dark city to hunt for the Japanese Club.

In the lobby of the big brick-and-stone building a young Chinese soldier was asleep at a desk. Alan went over and shook his shoulder. The soldier jumped up, blinking his eyes sleepily.

"You Mista Hunter?"

"Yes," Alan said.

A restrained eagerness appeared on the wide yellow face. "You fly plane for China?"

"That's right."

A smile broke broadly. "That very good. Come."

He led the way briskly to an elevator and in it he faced Alan again. "You come from Nanking?"

"Yes."

"Jap make burn very bad?"

"Make burn very damned bad," Alan said.

The long-lidded eyes gazed at him steadily. "Soon we fix 'em. Soon we fix 'em with plane."

"We'll do that, pal."

The warmth Alan heard in his own voice surprised him. He flushed and dismissed the soldier a trifle curtly at the door of his room. Alone in the room he stood looking around, feeling suddenly tired. It was a big room with a double bed and a dresser and desk and large upholstered chairs. It felt warm and peaceful after the long jolting ride in the lorry.

Alan stretched out on the bed in his clothes. The muscles in his back ached and he thought, Christ, I'm out of training. He tried to figure out what kind of exercise he would organize for the fliers who would come in. But he kept seeing the road moving at the sides of the jogging truck and seeing the soldiers in the back of the lorry up ahead and hearing the suppressed sounds behind him as he rode.

Christine's face came through it all then and his mind was so numbed by fatigue that at first a drowsy

warmth came into his thighs and he thought he was pulling her close to him on the bed.

Then he knew that she was not there and that she would not be.

He rolled over with his face in his arms and his fists gripped tight above his head. Finally he slept.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SOMEBODY knocking on his door awakened him. He sat up and saw that the sky was clear and there was a high sun. He got off the bed and opened the door, still rubbing at his eyes.

A little yellow-haired Irishman was standing there. He offered his hand and his eyes wrinkled at the corners. "I'm Mike Hogan," he said. "I was told you're the guy I want to see."

Alan grabbed his hand. "Mike Hogan!" He stared at the little fellow's round ruddy face with its blue eyes and freckled pug nose and broad mouth with two gold teeth in front, and he stared at the blond hair that lay in tight curls close to the small head. "Jesus Christ," Alan said. "I thought Mike Hogan was a grown man!"

"A lot of people get fooled," the Irishman grinned.

"Well, for God's sake, am I glad to see *you*! Come in!"

Hogan walked into the room and Alan kept staring at him. It was hard to believe that this was the dare-devil Mick who had flown with the Loyalists and raised

such hell in Spain. Hogan wore a shabby pair of blue slacks and a heavy black turtleneck sweater, and with his jaws working on his gum and his two gold teeth showing he looked like a kid trying to seem tough. But his face was not so young, Alan saw when he looked at it closer. There was a tic under the right eye that kept jumping and there were the strained lines around the blue eyes that come into the faces of men who have spent a long time in the air, especially those who have been fighting in it.

Alan discovered he was still gripping Hogan's hand. He let it go. "No fooling," he said, "this is a break—getting you."

The Irishman said, "Thanks." He picked a comfortable chair and sat down, cocking one foot on the other knee. "To tell the truth, it's a break for me too."

"How's that?" Alan gave him a cigarette.

"Well, I wanted to fly over here—I felt sort of sorry for the Chinks, but I didn't know how I'd get along with 'em, not talking their lingo. I didn't see how I'd even make 'em understand what I'd come to do. I stayed up most of last night practicing, making signs like a plane. Then they sent me to see you and I was damn near scared you'd turn out to be a Chink too, with a borrowed white monicker."

Alan laughed. "Come on, let's go get a drink."

They went down to the bar and Alan ordered a bottle of vodka and suddenly it seemed Borisov ought to be there too. His eyes stung and he slapped away his cigarette smoke.

"You drink that stuff here too?" Hogan demanded in surprise. "Hell, I had so much of it in Spain while the Russians were there I thought it was the Spanish national drink."

"D'you want whisky instead?"

"No, I like the rotgut."

The waiter brought the bottle and they filled and clinked their glasses. Alan felt happy and strong as the hot vodka smarted his empty stomach. He leaned toward Hogan. "I hope you know what you're getting into. It's going to be a tough job."

"That suits me. I've been grounded too long."

"That's how I feel. But we'll have to wait a while. We haven't got any planes yet."

"The boat I came on brought some in. Aren't they ours?"

Alan jerked up straight. "Jesus Christ!" He felt the blood hammering in his ears. "How many?"

"I don't know. They were knocked down "to ship——"

"What kind?" Alan's fingers stayed tight on his glass.

"American fighters. P-40's, and boy, are they sweet! They looked sweet even in pieces——"

"A dozen? Half a dozen?"

"Enough for all of us so far, I guess. Eight or ten——"

Alan stared at him. "Didn't you come in alone?"

"No, there were eight other lads on the boat. They had to drive up. They'll be along later. I found a chance to hop a plane from Rangoon. You'll like these other lads. One of 'em is Roger Smith. Know him?"

Alan took a drink. The glass rim chattered against his teeth. "I know of him. He's good, isn't he?"

"Damn good. I flew with him in Spain. He's got a mean temper, but he's a sweet flier. And boy, these planes are sweet, these P-40's. I wish we'd had 'em in Spain."

"What'd you fly there?" Alan steadied his voice but he was still seeing those pieces of planes in crates on the Rangoon dock.

"Russian stuff mostly. I-15 and I-16 fighters and SB light bombers and two-wing pursuits. We flew 'em all. There weren't any specialists on that job."

"Are they good?"

Mike smoothed at the tic in his face, thoughtfully. The nerve under his eye was fluttering hard. "The light bombers are good. The SB's. They're all-metal and fast and they carry good guns. The chasers are fast too, but that's the trouble with 'em. They're too fast. They don't maneuver well in a fight. And then when you land 'em they come in so fast that they crack up unless you have a good field."

"That's too bad," Alan said. "We have some of them coming in. But we'll have good fields."

"That's okay then. They're all right. They're not like the P-40's but they're better than the Jap crates. They'll be all right if we have good fields."

"We haven't many fields now of any kind, but they're building. They'll be okay. I've seen some of them."

"Well, you've got to have a good field for those ships. But they're not so bad as the big Russian bombers. Those big babies're too heavy and slow and their guns are all forward. When something gets on your tail you're through. I know. I had two of 'em shot out from under me."

Alan laughed. The warmth from this talk he'd been hungry for was spreading through him with the vodka's

warmth. "You'd better not let Borisov hear you say that."

"Borisov! The Russian general? Is *he* here?"

"He's our boss. He's running the show. You know him?"

"I'll say! He was in Spain. He's a smart Russian! But I thought Chiang was running this show."

"He is but he lets someone else handle the front. He does the bigger things. He's a thinker. Have you heard of the new road in from Burma?"

"I'll say! We flew over it. My God, fella, that's a road. We flew for miles over the mountains and here was this damn thing winding and twisting below the whole damn way. Boy, it's something!"

"It's Chiang's road," Alan said. He felt the warmth in him swelling to a queer pride. "It was his idea and when Chiang gets an idea, things happen fast. That road is our first job, Mike. We're going to patrol it and keep the stuff getting through from Rangoon."

Mike stared back at him. "Oh, boy," he said softly, happily. He asked Alan then, "How many of us will there be—when we get organized?"

"Plenty, I hope. There won't be many to start. There are a lot of Chinese but they won't be much help

for a while. Training them is one of my jobs. Want to help?"

"Sure," Mike said.

"But we'll have Russians, and some more Americans, I hope. Damned few at first, though."

"Don't worry." Mike sat gazing back at him seriously, chewing his gum. "We'll make out all right."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE pilots came in, first the Chinese, then the first group of Americans from Rangoon. Finally the Russians arrived, a few at first with their ground crews and technical men; then more of them came until the clubhouse was full and they had to find quarters in private homes and hotels. Most of the Russians were big men, with shaved heads and calm expressionless faces. They were full of the confidence that Borisov had, a confidence born of long training, and Alan found that there was not much they needed to learn.

The Americans, too, knew how to fly. But the Chinese knew little more than how to get a plane in the air.

Alan organized classes and drew charts on big blackboards in the club's assembly hall and drilled the Chinese in combat flying technique. But it was slow tedious work. It was hard to explain the complicated maneuvers to the Chinese without planes and with only a poor knowledge of their language.

Somehow the excitement he had expected to find in his job had gone flat. Christine was in his thoughts in-

stead of his pupils, and he cursed her for staying there. As the days passed he grew restless and irritable. He wanted to fly. When the planes came, he told himself, he would forget about her. For Christ's sake, he thought, why should it take so damned long to get them here?

He drank to make himself sleep, but lay awake just the same wondering where Christine was and if Neill was good to her and hoping he was and hoping he wasn't, and worrying for fear the Japs would blast the planes before they got off the Rangoon docks or that the blasting would happen over Chiang's road.

Then one noon as he was coming from his Chinese pupils he saw a familiar robed figure standing outside the clubhouse.

He walked faster. Father François came to meet him. Their hands gripped tightly and for a moment neither spoke. The priest looked older and thinner, Alan saw, but there was still in his face a look of calm patience. It was Father François who spoke first.

"I was in Hankow and hoped you might not be annoyed if I visited you."

"I'm glad, Father."

"Besides," Father François said, "I have news that may interest you. I wanted to tell it to you."

Alan's voice came out in a whisper. "Is she dead?"

"No. No. But it is a miracle that she is not. Come—I must eat lunch and hurry back to my work. Shall we lunch together?"

They went to a small restaurant near by and when they had ordered Father François said, "She is with Mother Helena."

It was hard for Alan to breathe. "But where's——?"

His hands gripped the sides of the table and he sat with his lips tightened.

"I do not know why you and she parted," Father François said gently. "I do not know what happened to her before I found her, or where she had been. I did not ask her and she did not tell me. So I shall tell you only what I know."

Alan nodded dumbly.

"As you know," Father François said, "the Japanese came into Nanking soon after you left. They came in in great numbers and they were like beasts. They fought their way through the gates and drove their tanks over the defenders and left those who still lived to die in the streets. It was barbarous. I have seen war. I have seen the brutal killing of wars. But I have never seen such a thing as that at Nanking."

Alan kept staring at him, waiting.

"They bound soldiers and women and children together and poured oil on them and set them afire. They lined defenseless soldiers up against walls and killed them with bayonets. They burned and pillaged and raped. They raped women and girls in the streets and the soldiers gathered and watched and laughed like insane men——"

Alan half rose. "Did they get her?"

"No." The old priest put a hand on his arm. "I found her hiding in the hospital grounds."

"Alone?"

"Yes. I took her inside the hospital. The Japanese had not come in there yet. Christine was very frightened but she helped the nurses with the wounded. When night came I decided that we would try to get out of the city. One of the Chinese nurses volunteered to help us escape. She led the way through back streets and alleys and Mother Helena and I followed with Christine. We got out somehow, just how I do not yet know. We walked out while the soldiers back in the streets were yelling and setting new fires. I prayed and we walked for miles in the dark, toward the west. I finally thought it would be safe to rest. We were well out of the city then, although we could still see the fires plainly. The Chinese girl left us. She was a very brave

one. Christine was brave too. She was exhausted, but she refused to sleep at the side of the road. She insisted that Mother Helena and I sleep instead. But in a few minutes she fell asleep in spite of herself, and finally Mother Helena slept too, and when Mother Helena awakened I slept a little. It was necessary for someone to keep watch. But the Japanese did not come that far from the city. We had to wake Christine at last, so that we could travel on. I asked her where we could take her, where she wanted to go. I will tell you what I expected. I expected her to ask for you. But she said, 'I want to go where you two go. I want to help in your work.' So I sent her ahead with Mother Helena and she is helping her now."

Alan's food had grown cold before him. "Where are they?"

"I do not know," Father François replied. "They do not work by any plan. They go where the need for help is greatest."

He took up his fork and began to eat with leisurely calm. "I do not know what happened that separated you and her. But I think that you will meet her again. I think it is meant to be." He smiled across at Alan. "It is only a feeling I have. Perhaps only because I hope it."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE planes came.

Alan and Mike stood together watching them skim down to the Hankow field, sturdy Russian chasers and bombers covered with dust from their flight across Turkestan.

The pilots climbed out and Alan and Mike shook hands with them and talked with them, but Alan kept edging toward the nearest cockpit and he saw Mike waiting to catch his eye. Mike was ready and when Alan gave the signal with his head each of them got into a ship and the pilots spun the propellers for them. Side by side they rose into the sky and stayed up for twenty minutes, climbing and twisting and diving, trying out the fighters. When they came down and met on the ground Mike's eyes were shining.

"God damn it," he said, "who taught you to fly?"

"You're okay yourself," Alan said.

They stood together again looking at the planes they had brought down. The planes sat solid and strong with their motors easily idling.

"That Borisov better come soon," Mike said, "or by God I'm not going to wait."

"Right," Alan agreed.

The days passed quickly after that. Alan organized squadrons and assigned squadron leaders. He took the young Chinese fliers up and showed them how to do the things in the air that he had taught them in the classroom. Mike helped. The Chinese were eager and did better, once their hands got on the controls.

Alan woke one morning to find himself being shaken violently. Dawn hadn't yet broken and he couldn't see who was shaking him. But the next moment he heard a familiar roar.

"Ho, now, get out of that bed and stop wasting time!"

Great arms hauled him out and hugged him. He pummeled Borisov's back joyously.

"You old bastard," he said, "I thought you'd run out on us."

"Are you ready to fight those Jap monkeys? Or is all my time and trouble for nothing?"

"By God, you bring 'em on and see!"

While Alan put on his clothes, Borisov sat on the foot of the bed, talking happily, swinging his leg. A big sword in a Chinese scabbard hung at his side. He

was smiling and bursting with strength. His talk was full of the confidence that showed in his face.

"Those Japs are having a fine time in Nanking," he said, "but that is where they have made a mistake." He got up and paced back and forth in the room. "They have stopped there and they are gorging themselves on the good things of life. It has given me time to plan a little surprise."

Alan said soberly, "I've heard some of the things they're doing in Nanking."

Borisov stopped walking. "I have never heard anything like it. They are systematically destroying the city and everything in it. It is something the Chinese will not soon forget. And the things they have done to the women! They have cut off one part of the city and made the entire zone a brothel. It is legitimate for the soldiers to take any woman who lives in that zone." He shook his head grimly. "I suppose it does provide a wide choice."

"What's this plan of yours?" Alan asked.

"That is something I cannot tell you just now." Borisov sat down on the bed, rubbing his hand over his hair. "It is a policy. I boast of the things I have done, not of the things I am planning to do. It avoids the necessity of making apologies. But this time there

will be no apologies. It is as much as accomplished." He jumped up from the bed, his sword clanking. "Hurry and finish that primping! We are going for a drive south."

Alan put on his shoes and as he tied them Mike came into the room.

Mike stopped when he saw Borisov, then grinned widely, his gold teeth flashing. "By God, it's time you got here, you big Russian ox!"

Borisov turned and scowled at him fiercely, standing with his legs spread and his fists on his hips. "Who is this cherub who addresses Borisov in such fashion?"

Then he bent forward and seized Mike in his arms and swung him up off the floor. "Mike! I am glad to see you here, you no-account midget!"

"Come on, I'm ready to go," Alan said.

"It is about time," Borisov told him. "But wait, first I will say a few things to you both. There are some things that must be done quickly. How are the Chinese pilots?"

"They're okay," Alan said.

"Better than you'd think," said Mike.

"Good! Then listen. The Americans and the best of the Chinese will proceed south to Kunming. You two will go, I will take you now, and there you will

form the patrol to guard the supply road from Burma. There are good landing fields at Kunming and they are well hidden. That will be the principal base for the patrol planes. Planes are already there. The rest of the Chinese will stay here and you will assign instructors to continue their training."

Alan said, "What about the Russians?"

"They will remain here also and be ready for duty. I will need them in the little surprise I have planned. Come, now we will eat something and then we will leave for Kunming right away."

They went outside. A long open military car was waiting in front of the club. They found a restaurant and ate breakfast hurriedly. When they finished Alan left Borisov and Mike at the car and went into the club and got his bag and left the instructions for the pilots. Then he went back to the car and got in beside Borisov. Mike sat in front with the uniformed Chinese driver and they rode out of Hankow to the west.

The day was breaking clear and cold and they were all in high spirits. Borisov talked and laughed, lolling back in the seat with his beret pulled down on his head. He drank from his old and battered flask and passed it around.

"I do not know what use you can make of this

Mike," he said. "He was no good in Spain. All he did there was drink and chase after women. Once I found him asleep in his plane with a woman. They had spent the night there."

Mike said, "Go to hell. I was due a woman. I'd got two Fascists that day."

"That is so. But you were constantly after the women."

"Only one woman." Mike felt in his pocket and brought out a faded snapshot and showed it to Alan. "That's her. Her name's Serafina Gonzales and she's one honey. You can see that."

A dark-haired Spanish beauty with big limpid eyes and lovely lips smiled up from the picture.

Alan agreed. "She's a honey all right."

"She's more than that. She's my luck," Mike said. "She brings me luck when I'm flying. That's why I keep her picture with me. I'm going back for her when this job is cleaned up."

Borisov took the picture. "Yes, that is the one I found him asleep with in the plane. Asleep! You see, he is no good."

Alan said, "It must have been quite a show in Spain. I'm sorry I missed it."

Mike put the picture back in his pocket. "You're in

on it here. It's all the same show. When it folded up over there I came here to catch the next round. So did Borisov."

"That is so," Borisov said gravely.

"I wish you guys would quit kidding yourselves," Alan said. "That talk makes me sick. 'Humanity's cause'! You both know damn well there's only one thing we're fighting for, and that's money."

Borisov looked at him, studying him quizzically.

"Where's that flask?" Alan said.

They reached Chungking at nightfall and spent the night in an ancient hotel, talking and drinking in their room until late in the night. The next day they drove again, starting at daybreak, climbing for hours over twisting mountain roads, until late at night they came to Kunming high on China's southwestern plateau.

"Stop," Borisov said to the driver. The car stopped and Borisov got out and pointed through the darkness. "Look," he said.

Alan and Mike strained their gaze. Beyond Kunming to the west they could see many flickering torches. Alan knew what they were. They were the torches of the thousands of Chinese women and children who were laboring day and night with their hands to complete the serpentine highway to Burma.

The three beside the car stood silently together. They could see the blowing flames of the torches and they could hear the thin high-pitched voices of the coolies and the women and children as they sang and worked on Chiang's road.

They got back into the car and rode through Kunming still in silence. In the small roadside inn where they stayed that night Alan slept with the song of the Chinese laborers in his ears.

At daybreak Borisov thumped his back to wake him. They drove out into the hills outside of Kunming and inspected the newly built airfields.

"They're okay," Mike said. His blue eyes were glowing.

"They'll do," said Alan. He could feel his heart beating.

They looked at the small hidden stores of fuel and munitions that had come in.

Borisov was solemn as he surveyed them. "It is not much so far. But it is a start. Come. We are not through traveling yet."

"But I thought this was where we live now," Alan said.

"That is so, but first we are going on a trip."

Alan and Mike looked at each other bewilderedly

and got back in the car. They drove out of Kunming and onto Chiang's new mountain road to the south and west.

The barefooted laborers looked up from their grading work at the side of the road and waved as the car passed. Borisov and Mike waved back and Alan found himself doing the same.

They drove for five days, climbing slowly for hours, snaking and twisting up the steep curving road, then plunging down sheer, almost perpendicular drops with the driver sweating and struggling at the wheel, and only inches separating them from a thousand-foot drop into the valley and death.

Twice they crossed bridges suspended hundreds of feet over gorges with angry rushing mountain streams far below, first over the Mekong, and then, after a five-thousand-foot drop into a sweltering valley, across the raging Salween, creeping across while the boards of the bridge rattled and danced and the car bounced and rocked. The bridge itself undulated with the weight of the car and the river roared far beneath.

Mike's face was white when they got across at last. "By God," he said, "I'm glad I'll be up above. It's too damn dangerous here on the ground."

"How in hell can trucks get over a road like this?" Alan demanded.

But all along the road they met the arms trucks moving in from Rangoon. There weren't many of them, but a steady trickle of lorries grinding up the inclines and nosing down the steep twisting grades to the valleys, getting through with the arms.

Then the car was climbing out of the valley, with the Salween behind, and creeping up through the mountains until the clouds were beside it, forming white halos on the barren scrub pines that grew in the dry earth of the mountains. They crossed into Burma and came into the sprawling hill town of Lashio which was the end of the new road through the mountains, and from there they drove easily through rich rice fields and teak forests to Rangoon.

They rolled through the broad modern streets of Rangoon past the towering golden Shwe Dagon Pagoda to the docks where dozens of ships were loading from the glistening hills of rice and the great heaps of teakwood on the docks. And there were American ships unloading the arms with which China would fight.

Borisov got out of the car and Alan and Mike followed him, and the three stood watching the huge

cranes swinging the crates out over the sides of the ships and piling them on the docks. They watched silently as the docks became crowded with the shining white crates. Then suddenly Borisov went forward and put his hand on one of them, patting it as a child would a favorite toy. "With these," he said, "I will drive the Japanese into the sea."

They stood there together. Borisov reached inside his sweater and drew out the flask. "I brought you over the road," he said, "because I wanted you to see what it is that you will be guarding."

He drank from the flask and passed it. Alan and Mike took it in turn and drank silently.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THEY flew back over the mountains in a Chinese transport plane. Borisov and Mike joked a good deal, reminiscing about Spain. Alan listened to them and was silent, looking down at the winding yellow dirt road.

The plane came at last to Kunming and dipped down to land at the camouflaged airfield where the new P-40's were lined up with the ground crews working on them. Somehow Alan felt a keener thrill as he looked at the sleek fighting planes than he had felt when he had seen them a few days before.

He and Mike got out of the transport. Borisov leaned out.

"Remember, it will not be long before the Japs go to work on that road," he told them. Then the plane's motors roared and Borisov shouted, "Good luck, little ones!" and was gone.

Mike looked at Alan. "Well, we're here. I don't care how soon the Japs come."

Alan nodded. "Come on. We'd better get busy."

They checked the planes and supplies and began

setting up a system of raid warnings. When that began to take shape Alan called the pilots together and organized units. There were three units, each with twelve planes. "Take care of those planes," Alan told them. "There are plenty of mugs like ourselves to do flying, but there aren't plenty of planes. We can't spare any of 'em. Bring 'em back."

He chose big surly Roger Smith and a lank Texan called Slim to lead two of the units. The other he headed himself.

"I want you to fly on my wing," he told Mike. "I think we can do things together."

During the next few days they went up and tested the planes and practiced attacks, and when the Japs came they were ready.

Alan and Mike were sitting together in the mess hall under the trees after mess when the warning light flashed. They both saw it and sprang up. Alan sounded the siren that was the signal for the planes to get into the air. He and Mike ran out on the field. The other pilots came running to the planes, adjusting their helmets and parachute packs. Then they were all in their cockpits and Alan was giving the signal to start.

There was a thundering of motors and the planes took off, one at a time, with Alan leading the way and

Mike climbing a little behind him, flying just to his right where by turning his head Alan could see him. Alan grinned into his mouthpiece. "Mike, how do you feel?"

"I feel swell," Mike's voice came to him. "Bring on your damn Japs."

They climbed higher and higher, up through the clouds, with the wind howling and racing around them and the hammering roar of the motors sweet in their ears.

Alan let the throttle all out and felt the plane lunging and straining beneath him. He put his hand down on the trigger that fired the six guns of the plane and let his hand rest there softly. There was a fierce swelling sensation in his chest.

He kept on climbing until he felt his head pound as the air became thin and his lungs struggled for oxygen. Then he leveled off and the planes following him leveled off too. He looked back through the glass canopy of the cockpit and saw them behind him, flying true in formations of three, and he felt pride in the men he was leading into the fight.

They flew northward to meet the Japanese, but for a long time there was no sign of an enemy plane in the sky. Then the clouds parted beneath them and

there, far below, was a formation of ten big bombers, flying without escort because of the distance, and just for a moment Alan felt the fear that he had always known to come at first sight of battle. A coldness crept into his chest and there was a feeling of being all alone in the sky with the enemy. Then Mike's voice came over the radio, excitedly. "Hey, boss! Look at those fat boys!"

Alan laughed then. The fear went away and there was only the burning urge to fight. His face grew hard and he rocked the wings of his plane. "Come on!" he shouted into his mouthpiece. "Let's get 'em!"

They all went down together in a great roaring dive, with their guns blazing, and at first the Jap pilots didn't know what had hit them. They hesitated, then scattered, dumping their bombs on the barren side of the mountain and streaking for home. But not all of them got away.

Alan saw one in front of him, running. He got on its tail and came in close, firing in under its belly. He could see the rear gunner firing at him but the Jap pilot zigzagged the plane and the gunner's bullets went wild.

Alan was so close he could see the face of the gunner. The Jap was gibbering with fear. Alan thought,

You bastard, now you know how they felt in Nanking. He kept his guns open. The bomber's left engine started to burn, then a wing. The flames seemed to be licking at the windshield in front of Alan's face. Then the bomber twisted and rolled and plunged earthward, flaming. Alan looked down and saw it smash into the side of the mountain.

There were two other smoking wrecks on the mountain where bombers had crashed. The sky was clear now of Japanese planes. Alan turned and started for home, with his heart still pounding and his breath coming fast. He looked back and the squadron again was forming behind him. There were no gaps in the formation of planes. He grinned and leaned forward and spoke into the mike.

"Let 'em come, gang," he said. "We can take 'em!"

They went back to the field and climbed out of their planes and stomped into the mess hall. They all sat there and discussed the fight and drank, happily.

"Boss, I saw you run down that big fellow," Mike said. "It was swell. Mine got away, but I don't think he'll get home."

"It was a good show," Alan said. "But that's just the start. They'll be back."

He got up and went out on the field. The ground

crews were going over the planes. Wings and tails were shot up. Alan stood and looked at the formation of planes, pitifully small on the big field. We'll have to patch these babies up fast, he thought. And God knows what we'll do when they're gone.

The Japs came back after dark. Alan got the alarm and ran out on the field. Mike was already there, leaning on the side of his plane.

He grinned. "Hi, boss. Looks like we don't sleep tonight."

Alan said, "Hell, let's get this over and get to bed."

He climbed into his plane. The other fliers were ready. They took off and climbed into the night, heading north again. It was cold. Alan sat with his shoulders hunched, slumped in the cockpit. He looked back to his right and he could see Mike, flying true on his wing. He leaned forward and spoke into the mouthpiece.

"Hey, Mike, that wasn't a bad idea you had when you kept a woman in your plane. You need one on a night like this."

"You ain't kiddin'," Mike answered. "I could sure use one now."

"Me, too," Alan said. He thought of Christine, and for a few moments the soaring feeling he'd had when

he was with her merged with the joy of flying. He tried to put her from his mind as he raced through the darkness, but he kept thinking of her, wondering why she had left Neill, or if Neill had left her, and where she was now, and whether Father Francois had been right when he'd said——

“Hey, boss, look up!” Mike’s voice came excitedly over the radio.

Alan looked. The sky was full of Jap bombers, dropping down.

“Jesus Christ!” Mike yelled. “Did you ever see such a mob?”

“Let’s get ’em,” Alan said. “Good luck, Mike.”

He climbed into the massed Japanese planes. This time the Japs didn’t run. They stayed in a tight wedge formation, boring through toward the south. It was hard going, in the dark, getting in close against the concerted fire of their guns. Alan got one in his sights and drove in. Bullets ripped through his windshield but he held his fire till he was in under the plane’s belly. Then he gave it a burst. It caught fire and went down and he turned to another. He saw one of his planes go down, trailing flame, then another. Good Christ, he thought, good Christ, poor kids, good-by, whoever you are. He opened his guns on the Japs, blaz-

ing at anything that got in his sights. A lot of them were falling. Alan felt a hot pride in his chest. His boys were doing a job.

Finally the bombers quit and swung back north. Alan watched them go and then banked and headed for home. He was tired. His head throbbed. He leaned close to his mouthpiece. "Mike!" he called. "Mike, are you there?"

"Yeah, I'm here. God damn those bastards!"

They flew in silence to the airfield. Alan climbed out and didn't wait to see who had come back. He went into the mess hall and got a bottle of whisky and sat down and drank out of the bottle. Mike followed him in. He sat down and Alan gave him the bottle.

"You saw it?" Alan asked him.

The nerve under Mike's eye was jumping hard. "Yeah, I saw it."

"Who were they?"

"Slim and Bill."

Alan put his head on his hand. Two gone, he thought, Slim and Bill gone, and two planes, and we're only beginning. It made him feel sick.

Mike shook him. "For God's sake, look at that!"

The warning light on the board was flashing.

"Sweet Christ Almighty!" Alan said. "Is this the way it's going to be?"

He dragged himself up. Mike was fastening his helmet. He looked so tired that he looked old. Alan tried to push him down into his chair. "Sit this one out, Mike."

Mike yanked away. "You go to hell! Nobody's grounding me!"

He ran ahead of Alan, out onto the field. The other men were running to their ships too. They all went up and flew together through the black sky, looking for the Japs that were coming back.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE bombers kept coming, boring in, night and day. Alan grew haggard as his little group of planes and men dwindled.

Now and then a new plane would come in, crated and loaded on a truck that turned off to the airfield from the stream of trucks moving north. But that wasn't enough.

Finally the bombers got through. They blasted the road and smashed the bridges over the Mekong and Salween. The arms trucks lined up while the Chinese coolies and women sweated and worked to repair the bridges. Alan flew over the bridges and thought, Well, we did all we could. I can't help it if the bastards got through.

He flew back to the airfield and got out of his plane. He went into the mess hall and lay down on a wooden bench. Mike followed him in and sat with his head propped on his hands over the table. They didn't talk. Alan thought, Well, this is the end; I give up. He remembered the few remaining P-40's lined up on the

field, pitifully battered, and he thought, Nobody gives a damn what happens to us; they stuck us out here and forgot us. Yes, Borisov too, God damn him. Well, I've forgotten him, too; to hell with them all. And he slept.

He opened his eyes to see Mike shaking him. Mike didn't say anything. He just pointed to the alarm board, where a white light was flashing.

Alan wrenched away and turned over, with his face to the wall. "To hell with it," he said. "To hell with the light. To hell with it all. I'm too damned tired to go up."

Mike grabbed his arm and pulled him around. He stood over him with his red-rimmed blazing eyes close to Alan's.

"Then stay here, God damn you!" he said. "Stay here and sleep while those bastards kill some more women and children. You've seen how they do it. Stay here and dream about that. I'm going up."

He ran out of the mess hall. Alan sat up. He saw a white square of paper on the table where Mike had been leaning. He saw it was the picture that Mike always kept with him, the Spanish girl, Mike's luck picture. He grabbed it up and ran out to the field, shouting. But Mike was already in his plane with the motor

racing and the glass canopy rolled over the cockpit and as Alan ran up Mike took off.

Alan got into his own plane. The other pilots rose with him and Mike fell into formation. But Mike was not flying true, Alan saw. He was dipping now and then, out of line. Alan grew worried about him. But he didn't have much time to worry, because almost right away he saw the glistening wings of the Japanese bombers coming in.

He rocked the wings of his plane, signaling the attack, then dived into the bombers below.

The pleasure was gone now from flying. It was only a dirty business with one thought to it: How long will it take to drive these bastards away and get down again for some rest and how long will it be before they come back?

Alan was thinking that when he saw Mike race ahead and tear into the Japs. "Come back!" Alan yelled into the mouthpiece. "Come back here, you God-damned fool!"

But Mike didn't come back. He dived close to the bombers and opened up from below. His bullets smacked into the Japanese planes and the Japs scattered. But they didn't all run.

One of them swung his big ship around and got on Mike's tail and opened up with his forward gun. Alan saw Mike's plane get hit. It shuddered, then a wing crumpled and the P-40 plunged toward the earth.

God damn you, Mike, Alan thought, sobbing, why did you do it? He flew close to the falling plane and saw Mike struggling to roll back the canopy over the cockpit. Then he saw him get it rolled back and fall out. He saw Mike plummeting down, then floating as the parachute opened, and he let his breath out and started back to the fight.

But the Jap bomber circled and opened his guns on Mike as he floated to earth. Alan saw the bullets pounding into Mike's body, shaking him in the air like a rat. And then he saw Mike hanging limp.

The Jap bomber was turning away, heading for home. Alan watched it banking. He couldn't see clearly because there was a red haze in front of his eyes and there was a burning, hammering throb in his brain. He wrenched his ship back and turned after the Jap with the throttle all out and the plane lunging as he gave it the gun.

He closed in on the Jap, blazing away, with no thought but to kill. The hail from his guns sprayed

the Jap. The big bomber quivered. Alan kept firing and thinking, Take that, and take that, you dirty bastard, take that.

There was still the red haze in front of his eyes and even after the bomber started falling the haze was still there and he went down after the dead Jap with his guns still spewing away.

He saw nothing but the Jap and he didn't look back and didn't know that one of the bombers followed him down. When he felt the bullets ripping through the tail of his plane he looked back. But it was too late and the bullets kept coming. They made a funny smell of scorched metal that Alan could smell in the cockpit.

They ripped through an oil line, then, and smashed the instrument panel. The controls jammed and the motor conked out. Alan saw the ground coming up and he could see the big hats of the Chinese at work in the rice fields, and saw them coming up fast, and he thought, Well, this is it; I always knew it'd happen this way.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IT WAS quiet in the room but there seemed to be voices coming from a long way off. Alan heard the voices but he didn't open his eyes.

He lay still and tried to hear what the voices were saying. But he couldn't hear any words. He tried to move, but there was too much pain in his right side when he moved, and so he lay still.

He tried to think where he was and how he happened to be in bed. But it was too much effort to think. His thoughts were too muddled and his side kept throbbing and hurting.

The voices kept getting louder. He lay listening, and now and then he could distinguish a word and there was a familiar sound to the voices. He struggled to hear more of what they were saying and his mind became clearer and then he remembered the plane plunging down and the ground coming up, and he struggled again to keep from hitting the ground. There was a sharp searing pain and he cried out and someone bent over him. He opened his eyes and recognized Borisov leaning over the bed.

The Russian's face seemed to be swimming before him. Alan shut his eyes and waited and tried opening them again. He could see more clearly, but when he tried to move there was still the pain.

Borisov said, "You had better lie still, you midget, you."

Alan opened his eyes wider and saw someone else behind Borisov. It was Roger Smith, holding his flying helmet in his two hands and looking down at the bed. There was a strained anxious look on the flier's dark face. Alan tried to smile at Smith but it was too much effort to smile. He looked again at Borisov and wondered why the Russian was scowling at him.

"So you are not dead, then," he heard Borisov say, "but it is not your fault that you are not." His big shaggy brows were drawn down in a fierce frown.

Alan watched him and suddenly was able to talk. "Don't do that," he said. "It makes you look funny as hell."

Borisov didn't smile. He sat down in a chair by the bed. "So you think it is funny. Well, it is not funny to me when you try to get yourself killed." He reached down in his sweater and took out his flask. "Here, drink a little of this. It will make you feel better."

Alan tried to reach out but he couldn't move his

arm. Borisov said, "Oh, I am sorry." He got up and held Alan's head and poured the vodka carefully into his mouth. Some of it ran out of his mouth and the Russian wiped Alan's mouth with his hand and sat down again by the bed.

The vodka felt warm and good inside Alan. He felt stronger. He said, "Thanks."

But Borisov still scowled. "I have told you again and again that that temper of yours would get you into trouble. It is no time to lose your temper when you are flying a plane. No, not even in war. In war least of all." He took a drink himself and handed the flask to Roger Smith. "If it were not for your damn Irish luck you would not be alive. Is it not so, Smith?"

Smith nodded. "We thought you were gone but you landed smack in a paddy and after the Chinks got over their fright they pulled you out and brought you back to the field."

"It is a most amazing thing," Borisov said. "You are constantly losing your temper and someone is constantly saving you from the result of your temper. You cannot expect such things to go on forever." He looked at Alan steadily. "Nevertheless I have heard how it happened and I would have done the same thing."

He patted Alan's shoulder. They were silent, each

of them thinking of Mike, Alan knew. But no one mentioned Mike's name. It was not the thing to do now that he was gone.

Finally Smith said, "You sure did a job on that Jap, even if you did bust your ribs and arm doing it. You almost blew him to pieces."

Alan looked down at his bandaged arm and chest and he remembered the Jap falling and burning. "It was worth it," he said.

Smith put on his helmet. "I'd better get back." He started to the door, then turned. "Hurry up and get well. We can use you."

Alan tried to sit up. "How're things going?"

"We're holding 'em," Smith said. "But we need you."

"What about the bridges?"

"They're getting patched."

Alan watched him go and all at once he felt anxious to get back in the air. Borisov scowled at him again as if he knew what he was thinking. "Ho, now, I am not going to have any invalids chasing Japs."

"Don't worry," Alan said. "I've got a loaf coming to me."

Borisov got up and put the flask down inside his sweater. "I have to leave too. There is much to be

done. But much has been done. Much was done at the party I prepared for our friends from Nanking."

Alan tried again to raise up in bed. "What did you do to them?"

Borisov looked fierce in surprise. "You have not heard?"

"How in hell would I hear?"

"Oh, I am forgetting that you have been here asleep for several days. That is too bad. You missed quite a party."

"Well, for God's sake tell me about it."

The Russian came close to the bed. His eyes were gleaming. "It was a fine piece of entertainment. I am sorry you missed it."

"Well, will you for the love of Christ tell me what happened?"

"Yes. I will tell you. But little by little, so as not to excite you too much. It was a thing that took place at the city of Taierhchwang in Shantung."

"Well, go on!"

"As you perhaps know, the Japanese remained in Nanking for some weeks. They remained there and raped all the women, enjoying themselves, and it gave me a chance to prepare for entertaining them some more at Taierhchwang."

Borisov took off his beret and rubbed his hand over his hair, relishing what he remembered.

"So what happened, damn you?" Alan said.

"At last they came out of Nanking, potbellied and soft, and they were thinking that this war was not a bad thing. They did not come out in force but sent out small detachments in different directions to occupy the cities and towns to the west."

He was becoming excited himself. He bent over the bed.

"They were most arrogant. They maintained no regular lines of supply, but depended instead on their small armored cars to escort their supply trucks from one base to another. And one force moved into Taierhchwang and settled down there. They were careless and full of their stupid confidence and they did not even bother to post sentries to guard the armored cars or the trucks. And that is where my guerillas came in."

He gripped Alan's splinted arm. Alan didn't move away.

"It was most simple," Borisov said. "We moved in at night and destroyed all the bridges and we took over the trucks and the cars and we dug traps to prevent any tanks from coming in after the party had started. Then we attacked."

He stopped talking and watched Alan's face. His own was lighted with joy, like a child's.

"Was it good?" Alan asked.

"It was beautiful. It was perfect. We moved in in a fan-shaped attack and they were completely taken by surprise. We cut them up into small groups and blasted them. At least five thousand were killed. The others escaped but they did not run far. The planes came in then and blew them to pieces. Those Russian fliers did a nice job. Oh yes, it was a pleasant party."

Alan laughed with him, feeling happy and feeling his heart pounding. "I hope you give another one soon."

"I will." Borisov put on his beret. "I will. But I must go now. Good-by. We will not hold Taierh-chwang. We are not strong enough yet. But I have other surprises prepared."

He put his hand down on Alan's good shoulder. "We have begun now," he said earnestly. "You and I have begun and we will keep rolling now. We will win this war for Chiang, and for—but no, I will not bore you with such ideas, because I know you do not agree with me. But anyway I will not rest until the last battle is won, no matter whose war it is. I am not loafing now but I heard what had happened to you and

I came down to see for myself and make sure you were not taking it too easy. But now I am going back and keep the fight going. And soon you will too."

He stood looking down and there was a warm light in his fierce eyes. "But do not fight again too soon. First get strong. And do not get mad again. A little mad, perhaps, but not too mad. Good-by. I will see you again when I can."

"Good-by," Alan said.

Borisov turned to leave, but at the door he stopped and looked back. "I almost forgot. There is a surprise for you too. Someone you will like will be taking care of you. Someone you will like very much."

Then he was gone and Alan was alone. He stared after Borisov and then started smiling a little and thought, Well, that'll help some if they've given me a good nurse.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

HE LAY still, thinking about Borisov's battle with the Japs. But after a while it was too much effort to think. The pain in his side and arm was bad, and he lay with his eyes closed, not thinking, and finally he slept.

It was dark when he awakened again. There was a dim light in his room and there was someone in the room close to his bed. He lay without moving and saw that it was a Chinese nurse. He watched her as she worked quietly, and he remembered what Borisov had said. He thought, Not bad, if she has to be Chinese, and he kept looking at her with his eyes half shut. She was small and young with straight bobbed hair and a round face and a nicely formed little mouth. She wore a loose-fitting blue cotton gown with a high neck and long sleeves, and white cloth shoes and white cotton stockings. Suddenly she saw Alan watching her, and she smiled, showing even white teeth.

"Hello," she said. "How do you feel? I hope you are feeling better."

Her voice was low and pleasant, with only a faint touch of accent.

Alan smiled back at her. "Thanks, I guess I am."

"I'm glad," she said. "I will bathe you now and then you will have your dinner."

"That's okay with me."

She brought a thick white basin of warm soapy water and took off his pajama top carefully. It struck Alan as funny that a girl he had just met should be doing this to him.

"What's your name?" he asked her.

"Lotus. But in America they call me Lottie. You may call me that if you wish."

"Where were you in America?"

"I went to Wellesley."

He looked at her in surprise. "What were you doing at Wellesley?" He hadn't meant to ask it exactly like that.

She smiled. "Studying for work in social service."

"How'd you happen to come back here?"

"I always meant to, to work in China. But I came back earlier, on account of the war."

He stared at her in surprise again. "Most people try to get away from China on account of the war."

She smiled again and didn't answer.

Alan asked her, "You mean you wanted to come home to be with your people?"

"My people had been killed."

"Before you came back?"

"Yes. When the Japanese came to Peiping."

"Then what the hell was there here for you to come back to?"

She smiled gently. "There was a great deal." She washed his good arm briskly, humming an American popular tune. "Of course I miss the States," she said, as if trying to change the subject. "I have many good friends there, around Boston and also in Philadelphia and New York. I love American cities, and some day I will go back. I will go back and finish studying, I hope. Are you anxious to be flying once more?" she asked then.

"I'll be glad to get out of here," Alan said. He added quickly, "Except of course for the good service."

"You need not be so polite. Everybody hates a hospital. I should think especially a flier, who is used to being so free. I wish I could fly. I would join your fliers and protect our road and keep the supplies coming to our troops. That would be much better than what I am able to do now."

"You're doing your job pretty well," Alan grinned.

She smiled at him. "I am giving you an extra-

special good bath to thank you." She grew serious. "Do you know how much it means to my people, to the Chinese people, to have you Americans here helping us? There is the feeling somehow that if your country believes in us we cannot lose this war. We will not lose it. But even if we did we would never forget what you Americans have done."

For some reason Alan's thoughts flashed back to Mike talking about humanity's cause. Thinking about Mike, he said, "We won't lose."

It was spring, and the warm sunshine streamed into the room every day. Lotus sat beside his bed in the sun every moment that she could spare, and because of her Alan was not lonely or too impatient about his slowly knitting bones. He never grew tired of listening to her and watching her, because she was a combination that constantly fascinated him. She was a girl as intelligent as any American girl he had ever known, and she had humor that was like an American girl's humor. She had an educated person's knowledge, and yet at the same time she was like the simplest of her people and had the unquestioning faith of all the Chinese that what had happened to them would not last and that some day the Japanese would be gone and all

the little people who were left could go back to their homes and somehow live as they had lived before.

Then one day Lotus told him that she was leaving Kunming.

"My God," Alan said, "you can't go."

"But you are almost well now."

"But I'm *not* well. You can't go till I am!"

"I would like to stay," she said, "but new nurses have come in from Chungking and I am being transferred."

"That's a damned dirty trick!"

She left a week after that. She came into Alan's room one afternoon early in May carrying her small wicker bag and wearing a white traveling cape thrown over her blue cotton uniform. "I am going now, Alan," she said.

She took his hand and tried to smile at him. "Get well very soon and go on fighting for China. Will you?"

He didn't mean to do the thing he did. He didn't even know he was going to do it. He reached up and pulled her down to him and kissed her with his two hands holding her face.

CHAPTER TWENTY

HE WAS lonely after Lotus left.

He lay in his bed with the sun streaming in through his window and thought she had seemed so much a part of the room and even of the sunshine that it was hard to realize that she had gone.

Now and then he could hear the drone of a plane and he listened and followed its course. He could tell by the sound of the motor how high and how fast it was flying and sometimes he almost thought he could tell which one of the boys was flying it. He lay listening while the hours of that lonely day dragged by. He was tired of his bed and grew angrily impatient to be flying again. He could move his arm now and there was no longer any pain in his chest.

Somehow the afternoon passed. He watched the sunset and the gathering shadows. It was growing dark when the door opened and someone came into his room.

He didn't look around because it didn't seem very important who the new nurse would be. But the person

who had come into the room didn't move and finally he looked toward the door. He saw another girl wearing the blue dress of the Chinese nurses, and the white stockings and shoes. But she wasn't Chinese. She was blonde. It was Christine.

She stood there staring at him, and then she came toward him, moving slowly, with her wide gray eyes unbelieving. She came to the bed and stood beside it and put out her hand and touched Alan's face.

"Alan——?" she whispered, as if she expected him to say no.

"Chris," he said. "Chris. Good God."

He tried to raise himself up in bed but she dropped on her knees and slid her arms around him with her face tight against his, and she started crying.

"You're hurt," she said. "Did you crash? Oh Alan, are you all right?"

He felt the pain in his chest again as he held her to him, but he didn't care. "I'm all right. My God, I didn't think I'd ever see you again."

She dabbed at her eyes with his sheet. "I knew you were flying here at Kunming. That's why I asked to be sent here. But I didn't know you'd been hurt. Oh Alan, please tell me the truth—are you really all right?"

He laughed a little, holding her tighter. "You're the doctor, you ought to know."

"No, I haven't any sense—I'm too excited. Oh, I thought it would be hard to get to see you—I thought maybe you wouldn't want to see me. And now I've got you and you can't run away. Alan, is it really you? I just can't believe it. Can't you prove it some way?"

"Yes," he said, and he pulled her chin up and kissed her mouth, a long kiss that made the room swim and that had in it all the months of hungry loneliness since they had parted.

Christine struggled away at last. "Don't——" she said. She was still crying a little and laughing softly. "Yes, it's you. But don't do that. Not here—not yet. I can't stand it."

She got to her feet unsteadily and went to Alan's dresser and wiped her eyes and powdered and ran a comb nervously through her hair, looking toward the door. She came back to him then, calmer and smiling. Alan reached for her hands and tried to pull her back to him.

"Don't——" she said. "Be careful."

"I can't help it. God, Chris, you look so beautiful."

"I don't. I'm haggard."

As she came close he saw new fine lines around her

eyes. She looked older and she was thinner, but she was lovely. She was pale, but she had always been pale. Her hair was the same. There were still little gold lights in it. Alan tried to pull her head down to him but she held back and sat down in the chair and took his hand and laid her cheek against it on the side of the bed.

"Don't," she said. "I want to—I want to kiss you and kiss you and never stop. But they'll be coming in. The doctor said he'd be in. Just talk. Tell me about your crash. Tell me about your flying. I've heard about what wonderful things you and your fliers have been doing. I've been so proud. Tell me. Tell me everything."

"You tell me," Alan said. "You've heard about me but I haven't heard about you."

She looked up. "But Father François told you."

"He told me he'd found you and that you were working with him. But what happened before that?"

She put her head down and he could see her flush a little. She didn't answer.

"You left that son of a bitch," Alan said.

She tried to answer but no words came.

"Why'd you leave him?"

"Because he was dead."

Alan felt the happy warmth in him go chill, and he felt confused and cheated. "Oh," he said.

"No——" Her eyes pleaded with him. "No! You think I still love him. I don't; I despise him. But he died so horribly. Oh wait, I'll tell you——"

She sat up and stared off into the room but she still kept hold of Alan's hand.

"It happened right after we left the hospital together. He was white with fear when he came for me. We hadn't gone far when planes came and machine-gunned the Chinese who were running away from the fires. I could see the red streaks from the guns on the planes—I could see them through the smoke. I got separated from Neill, but finally I found him cringing against a building. He was so frightened he couldn't speak, but he hadn't been hurt. I managed to pull him along, keeping close to the buildings. Then the Chinese troops came, falling back. They were still trying to fight, but it was no use. The Jap tanks were following them, shooting them down and running over their bodies. Their bodies and their heads flattened out——"

Her hand holding his was wet with perspiration. Alan lay on his side with his other arm tight around her waist. He said, "You don't have to tell me about it, Chris."

"No, I want to. It doesn't matter; I can't forget it anyway. I still see it at night and whenever I'm not working. It's why I don't mind working so hard—it helps keep it away. Except that sometimes I see worse things. Well, we hid in the revolving door of a building and saw the Jap soldiers come running behind the tanks, shouting and laughing and jabbing their bayonets into the Chinese soldiers standing in the streets with their hands up. We saw them start raping the women and girls in the street and start tying the Chinese soldiers together and pouring oil on them to burn them. Suddenly Neill went running out like a crazy man, straight into it all, and at first I thought he'd really gone insane, then I thought he was going to grab up a Chinese soldier's gun and try to fight. But he didn't. He ran to the Jap soldiers screaming, 'I'm one of you! I've been working for you!' And a Jap soldier turned from burning the Chinese soldiers and ran his bayonet through him. I saw him screaming on the blade and he fell and the Jap put his foot on him and pulled the bayonet out. I ran out and kept running—back toward the hospital. I was running away from horror but I was running away from Neill too—even though I was nearly scared to death. And even though I pitied him I knew how much I loathed him.

They'd killed Dickie, and still he could do that——”

“Good God,” Alan said.

“The next thing I knew was when Father François found me. I guess I'd been out of my mind a little while——”

She was trembling, but she made an effort and grew calmer. “I've gone on seeing terrible things since then. But I'm all right now.”

Alan squeezed her hand, then put it up to his lips.

“At first I didn't think I ever would be again,” she said. “Just looking at Mother Helena made me realize what a hopeless coward I was. But Father François told me something that helped—something that made me able to stand all the suffering and blood. We were working together, trying to save an old Chinese woman with her arm and breast blown off, and suddenly I couldn't stand it any more. Father François saw—I was holding an artery with my fingers and if I'd let go she'd have died before we could catch it again. But Father François didn't take it from me. He just whispered to me, ‘Look at her eyes.’ I did, and her eyes were saying ‘Thank you. Thank you——’”

Her voice went faint and stopped.

Alan asked, “Did you hang on to it?”

“Yes.”

For some reason or other Alan thought of Lotus,

and for some reason that he didn't understand he pulled Christine down to him and kissed her as gently as he had kissed Lotus good-by. And he wanted to tell her about Lotus. But all he said was, "I hope you're as good a nurse as the one I had."

She drew away a little, smiling uncertainly. "Was she *very* good?"

"Not that way. I mean I don't know. She gave me good baths."

"I will too," Christine told him. "I'm an especially good bath-giver. You'll never miss her. Oh Alan, it's going to be fun taking care of you." She pulled his pajama coat up. "Oh, you *are* nearly well. I won't have you this way very long. But it was a bad hurt. Tell me how you crashed."

"A Jap got me while I was chasing another."

She looked at his eyes worriedly. "You won't let that happen again, will you?"

"No."

She didn't speak for a moment. Then she said, "I'll hate having you flying. Is—is your job just as much fun as you thought it would be?"

"It's no damned fun at all."

Her eyes kept searching his. "But you're going back to it?"

"Of course I am."

"Why?" She seemed not to breathe while she waited for his answer.

He held on to her hand but he said, "Hell, I have to make a living, don't I?"

She let her breath out slowly, still looking at him. Then she tried to smile. "Yes." She leaned quickly and kissed him. He tried to hold her but she tugged away from him and stood up. "Now I'm going to be your nurse and you can't kiss me."

"I always kiss my nurse!"

She looked at him with a new queer look in her eyes. "Do you—really?"

He laughed. "No. But from now on I will."

She dropped on her knees again and put her arms around him with a strength that surprised him. "Oh Alan, I—let's not fight this time—or ever any more at all——"

The door opened and she sprang up quickly, flushing. The Chinese doctor came in but he didn't act as if he had seen anything. He examined Alan while Christine grew very busy about the room. When the doctor left she didn't turn back to Alan.

"Where were we?" he said. "Come back here."

"No. I'm scared now. You see what can happen."

"Chris, please come back."

"No." A bell in the hall rang. "There, you see—you're not my only patient. I'm in demand. Good-by."

She blew him a kiss and hurried out.

During the afternoon she looked in from time to time, teasing him, staying at the door.

"Chris," he begged, "please come here."

"Do you want anything?"

"Yes."

"I mean anything important."

"Yes!"

"I mean important like a drink of water."

"Damn you!" he said.

After that she didn't look in any more. It grew dark in the room and a hospital attendant came with Alan's supper. He ate it without tasting it, feeling almost angry at Christine. Then the night nurse came in and turned on Alan's light. She was a new nurse too, a middle-aged American woman with a friendly hard-boiled face.

"Hello." She peered at Alan with a curiously pointed interest. "Are you doing all right?"

"I guess so," he said. He was thrashing restlessly.

"What seems to be the trouble?"

"Nothing that you can fix."

"I wouldn't even try," she said. "Why don't you take up knitting?"

He looked at her closer. Her lined face was sober, almost sour, but there was a faint twinkle in her eyes.

"Well, toodle-oo," she said. "Ring for me if there's anything I *can* do."

She went out and Alan lay wondering about her and wondering why he felt as if he'd known her a long time.

The Chinese doctor came, making his night rounds. He left and Alan lay alone, fidgeting. He thought of calling the nurse to talk to him. But instead he tossed a while longer and then tried to read. Finally he threw the book aside and snapped out his light.

He couldn't sleep. He turned on the light again and read some more and finally he shut it off and made up his mind to sleep. To hell with her, he thought, if that's all she cares.

Then he heard the door opening softly. He raised up in bed. "Chris?"

"Sh-h!" she said. She tiptoed to him. "It's all right. The night nurse is my friend."

She sat on the bed and leaned over him gently and kissed him in the dark, and he kissed her mouth and her face and her throat and said, "Chris—my God, Chris, I've been crazy for you."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

EVERY night she came to him and the days passed somehow. Then one morning the doctor told Alan to get up and dress and walk around and a week after that he told him he would be discharged from the hospital the following day.

That night when Christine came Alan said, "Chris, why don't you marry me?" Her voice was muffled, her head against his shoulder. "I didn't know you wanted me to."

"Don't you want to?"

"Yes."

He tried to lift her face to kiss her. But she kept her face down, and then his shoulder felt coolly wet.

"Chris!" he said. "You're crying."

"Yes, I am. Please let me. I've got to."

"But for God's sake why?"

"Because I'm happy. Because it does matter so after all. I thought it didn't. I thought that all the things I've been seeing were so big that it just didn't matter whether two people who were in love got married or not. I was glad I could think like that. It

seemed to make up a little bit for what a coward I've been. But now it does matter. And it's fun to have it matter. So let me cry."

"You're nuts," Alan said. "I'm almost afraid to marry you—our children might be like you. But I'll do it. We'll do it tomorrow as soon as I get sprung from here."

"No. I'd rather wait."

"Wait! What for?"

"For Father François."

"That's a swell idea," Alan said, "but it may be a long time before we see him again."

"Then we'll still wait."

"But if we're going to live together people might talk."

She laughed softly and happily. "Let them. I don't care. Father François and Dad both taught me not to care as long as I know that what I'm doing is right. And this time I do know."

Alan lay silently and thought of the times when he happened to mention the reason he was flying, and of how she would seem to withdraw from him even when she kissed him to change the subject. I haven't changed, he thought, and I won't change. I can't, not even for her.

"Sometimes you're not so sure," he said.

"I'm sure I love you." She put her mouth on his quickly to keep him from talking and make him forget what he had started saying. "Don't——" She held his hands down against the bed. "It's getting light—I've got to go."

They left the hospital together that morning. They walked slowly along the rolling streets of Kunming and into the hills near the airfield, for they had decided that was where they wanted to live. And near the field, nearly hidden in trees, they found a queer little house that was vacant.

It was double-decked, with its roof ends buckled upward, Chinese fashion, and it had small paper windows and a big oval door. The agent took them in, and Christine cried out with delight as she saw the neat living room, furnished in bare bamboo furniture, with a great straw mat on the floor. They wandered into the tiny bedroom that had a big canopied bed.

"Oh, Alan, I love it!" Christine said. "It has to be this."

"This it will be," Alan told her.

"But can we afford it?"

"Why not? I've got a good job."

She tried to smile quickly, but her smile trembled. He hadn't meant to say anything like that. He was try-

ing hard not to these days. But the thing seemed always between them anyway, and sometimes Alan felt angry that it had to be.

Christine had moved away from him toward a corner of the room. He walked to her and took hold of her hand again and said, "What've you found now?"

"Him," she said.

It was a tiny jade Buddha in a wall niche. Over him, in small finely drawn characters, the words *Wo-fo-tzu-pei* were inscribed.

"What does it say?" she asked, trying to ask it in a bright natural voice.

"'Our Buddha is merciful.'" Alan put his arm around her. The agent was in the other room, discreetly not entering the bedroom with them. Alan kissed her cheek. "I'm beginning to think he is," he said, "since he's given me you."

The unhappiness left her face. She laid her head against his shoulder.

They went back to Kunming and arranged to take the small house. That same night they came back, loaded with food and supplies.

"Wait here," Alan said at the door, and he went in and lighted the oil lamps. Then he came out and lifted Christine and carried her into their house.

They stood inside the closed door and looked at their home. Then they looked at each other and Alan put his arms around her again and tipped her face up. "This is the beginning," he said.

She smiled at him. "I hope the beginning never ends."

Later they lay in the big canopied bed, close together, with the lamp lit. They were happier than they knew anyone could be, but now Christine was looking at him in a strange sad way.

"What's the matter?" Alan asked.

"Nothing. Just—have you had lots of girls?"

"No, not very many. Why?"

"I was just wondering. Did you have some in Kunming?"

"No."

"Why didn't you?"

"I was too busy. Flying and women don't mix. Not this kind of flying."

She drew her breath a little sharply. "Then I won't mix."

"Yes, you will."

"But why should I be any different?"

"You are." He wanted to be able to explain it to her, to tell her that loving her was like flying when fly-

ing was beautiful, and that loving her now would make this dirty weary kind of flying seem more like the old kind of flying and easier to take. But he couldn't say it. He said instead, "I'll be flying for you, won't I? To earn us our house——" Then he stopped.

She kissed his cheek quickly. "Did you have any girls in Shanghai?"

"Just one."

"Where is she now?"

"She's dead."

"Oh." She asked then, "How did she die?"

"I don't know exactly. The Japs killed her."

Christine stayed silent for a long time. Then she asked, "What was her name?"

"Mitzi."

She turned her face down against his shoulder and was still, and again his shoulder felt wet.

She whispered, "Poor Mitzi."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WHEN Alan awoke the sun was shining on the bed and he was alone. He sat up and called, "Chris!"

No one answered.

He got out of bed and went to the kitchen, but she was not there. He wandered about the little house, bewildered, and decided that she had gone to market. But he remembered how they had come home with arms full the day before.

The morning passed and she did not come. He had eaten no breakfast. When he realized that he was hungry he went to the icebox. There was a plate waiting for him that Christine had fixed. He ate it sullenly. The afternoon dragged by and still she did not come. But by this time Alan knew where she had gone.

She came home at half past seven. She came in smiling and hurried to Alan and put her arms up and kissed him with a speechless gladness, and stayed in his arms, hugging him tightly, with her face pressed under his chin.

She gave a long trembling sigh as she finally spoke. "Oh, I've waited for this all day. And I'll have it for

such a little while. Because soon you'll be going back to work too."

Alan said in a strained voice, "I didn't know you were going to the hospital today."

She lifted her head and looked at him in surprise. "You didn't know?" She laughed a little. "But don't I always?"

"It's different now."

She drew back against his arms. "Alan!"

"I don't want you to go on working at the hospital."

She stepped back, away from him. "Alan!"

"Damn it," he said, "why should you? I'm making enough to feed us both."

"Oh," she said. Then she turned and walked quickly into the bedroom and shut the door.

He followed her, and closed the door again, shutting them together into the little room where they had found such happiness last night. He stood by the big canopied bed and remembered the night, and then he walked to her and took hold of her shoulders and turned her to him.

"I'm sorry I said that, Chris."

She came back against him with her fingers clutching his shirt. "Oh, darling——"

He kissed and stroked her hair. "I always say the

wrong thing. I keep forgetting how you feel. But damn it, all day I've wanted my wife——"

She laughed a little. "Oh, Alan, that sounds so lovely."

"It is lovely. It can be lovely all night and all day. If you'll stay home."

She seemed to stop breathing. Slowly she drew away again and looked at him bewilderedly. "You—you said you were sorry you said it."

"Said what? I said I was sorry I talked about my making money flying."

Christine took his arms down from around her and she looked very tired. She put her hand out to the bed as if she were too tired to walk alone. "Please, Alan——" she said faintly. "Please go out—please. I have to rest."

She stood there with her back to him, holding to the bed, waiting for him to go.

"You have to rest," he said. "You get up from in bed with me and sneak out to spend the day giving a bunch of Chinks baths and enemas and then you come back to me too tired to——"

"Please get out of this room!"

He came closer to her. "I love you, and I want you, and damn it, in a couple of weeks I'll be back flying

and Christ knows when I'll get to be with you or whether I can stay awake to love you when I do——"

She said in a choked angry voice, "If that's all you want me for——"

"Oh my God, Chris——" He pulled her back to him roughly. She struggled but he held her. "I've told you I never loved any other girl. I want you every damned minute—I want to do the things you want, I want to buy you things, I want to make you happy however I can. And all I ask you to do is quit your job——"

"It isn't a 'job'! Don't use that word. I can't stand it."

"All right—your work. Isn't one of us working for China and humanity enough? I'd like to hope we can have each other someday in peace, in lives of our own, away from this bloody mess. One of these days the Japs are going to bomb the airfield and when they do that they'll bomb the hospital. Isn't one of us enough risking his neck in this damned heathen war?"

She stood stiff in his arms and her face looked as though she hated him. She stood looking at his eyes and finally she said in a low steady voice, "I've thought of a way for you to make money. You could fly to the

Japs and make a deal with them, and then fly back in your Chinese plane and bomb the airfield.”

Alan let her go so suddenly that she staggered a little. He stood looking at her with his mouth tight and his jaw muscles moving. Then he walked out of the bedroom, leaving her alone beside the canopied bed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

FAR below, the arms trucks were crawling over the winding yellow road from Rangoon, laboring with their heavy loads, scores of them now, great rolling caravans.

Alan flew over them and watched them as they spiraled with the ribbon of yellow dirt like a patient parade of ants. A yellow dust came up from the road behind them. The dust welled up and became a golden cloud in the sun, and it looked to Alan like Christine's hair.

He thought of Christine as he flew, but not happily, because they were not happy together. She was still working at the hospital, and the whole thing had stayed between them. At first they had managed to forget it and find happiness close to each other at night. But it had come back even then, and now it was worse. Now it was there even when moments together should have been precious; now when they scarcely saw each other at all.

They were hardly even living together any more. When Alan couldn't come home, which was most of the

time, Christine slept at the hospital. When he was to be off, he telephoned her and she went home and was there when he came in exhausted and sometimes sick with discouragement. Twice the Japs had shot his plane away and he bailed out. He didn't tell Christine. It made him too sick to talk about those lost, shattered planes. At first she had been afraid for him and had tried to hide her fear. After that, when other boys from the field came to the hospital bleeding and broken, and some of them died, she had grown puzzled. On one of those nights when he had just lost his plane, she had asked, "Doesn't even a stray bullet ever hit your wing?"

He said, "No, I don't take any risks," and went on thinking of the pile of burning junk he had left behind, thinking of it with his face buried in his pillow.

The day after that the Japs had got through again and had bombed the trucks on the road, and the new planes that had been riding on them had gone into the ravine, flaming. That night Alan had said against Christine's breasts, "Oh God, Chris, let's get out of this."

"All right," she said, "you get out of it."

She had walked out of the little house and had gone to sleep in Sadie O'Brien's rented room, Sadie O'Brien

who was the hard-boiled American night nurse. And the next time Sadie had seen Alan she had said, with her sour look and her faintly twinkling eyes, "You need to be spanked. For the sake of humanity."

Alan thought about all that as he flew today over the arms trucks back toward the field, ending his patrol. Ahead he could see another of the boys winging toward him. They waved to each other as they passed. The Japs were napping today, it seemed. But they'd be out tonight. Alan thought, Well, I'll be out of it for one night, thank God.

As he went into the little house his heart beat harder as it still did always, and he hoped that tonight things would go right and there would be happiness.

He stopped abruptly inside the door. Low voices were coming from the living room. Alan recognized the strange one and walked in quickly. "Father!" he said joyfully.

Father François rose with both his hands held out. He was smiling too, but it was a sober and troubled smile.

"They sent me here from the hospital," he said. "I did not know I would find you too. I was going to the field from here. I did not mean to embarrass you."

"We've wanted you here," Alan said.

This was the thing they had both wanted, and now he forgot their unhappiness and looked at Christine eagerly. She looked back at him and he was shocked at her face beside the dim glow of the oil lamp. She was very pale and she looked strained and old.

Alan started toward her. "Chris! Now we can——"

She shook her head. "I don't want it now," she said.

They stayed looking at each other, and Father François looked from one to the other of them and then he went to Christine. He took her hand gently. "When I started to Kunming I hoped you had still waited for me—as you wrote me. What is the matter? What has happened?"

"We've pretended we were married," Christine said, "and we've been unhappy."

"That is because it was only pretense," the old priest told her earnestly. "Now let us make a new experiment."

"No," Christine said.

Father François turned to Alan. "Go to her—tell her that you wish it——"

Alan's mouth felt dry. "I don't want it if she doesn't want it."

Father François sat down and asked Alan to sit near him, and the old priest talked to them both. But

Christine's pale hardened face did not change. Finally Father François rose to go. There was pain in his eyes that Alan had never seen in them before.

"I am working in Chungking," he said. "I shall pray that you change your minds. When you do I shall come back in haste—before you change them again."

He smiled but the pain stayed in his eyes. He went out and the door closed after him, leaving a curious emptiness in the small room.

Christine spoke at last, with a strange polite gentleness. "There's nothing more to say, is there."

It was not a question, but Alan answered it. "No," he said.

She went quietly into the bedroom and quietly put her few belongings into her little suitcase. She came back through the living room, carrying the suitcase. She kept her face turned away from Alan, and went quickly out the front door.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE Jap bombers got through at dusk next day, five of them. They left a gang of fighters behind to keep Chiang's fliers back and the Jap fighters sent four of the defenders down in flames. Alan saw each one blaze down to earth, and saw the bombers roar out free, headed for Chiang's road, and he thought, Well, here goes nothing—good-by, Chris. And he tore after them.

He caught them over the ravines that gaped beneath the yellow road. He thought in a crazy sort of way, like an angry kid, Let that road alone, you bastards, and he drove under them and let his guns spit, and drove back and poured his lead at them again and got out of the way of two of them as they fell. Bullets spattered against his ship but the controls held, and he swooped and dived, firing and firing, and thinking, God damn you, let that road alone. Two more Japs went into the ravine with red comet tails behind them and the fifth went rickety and started down as his last bullets stung Alan's back and shot a wing limp and shattered his instrument board. The P-40 plunged and Alan

jumped and pulled his rip cord before the oncoming night closed around his brain.

He woke up sprawled on Chiang's road with his face in its yellow dust, but he couldn't see the yellow now because it was deep night. He pushed himself up slowly. He hurt all over. He felt his head and arms and legs and body, and every inch of him was sore but there was clotted blood only on his shoulder blade. He said out loud, Why, you dirty sons of bitches. Then he started walking, plodding painfully, up the yellow-dirt corkscrew, groaning heavily and cursing Chiang's road.

He kept trying to walk until daylight started seeping into the ravines. Blood was running down his back and he stumbled more often, and at last he didn't get up. The last thing he heard was a faraway roaring down where he had come from and the last thing he saw was a line of trucks creeping toward him around the corkscrew that was beginning to show yellow again in the first dawnlight.

He woke later in a bed and there was someone sitting beside him, someone blue. His shoulder hurt and he tried to put his hand back to it, but his hand was fastened to something and he couldn't get it loose. Something familiar and pleasant happened then. Some-

one kissed him. Peace flowed through him and he went back to sleep.

When he opened his eyes again the blue person was still there and this time he saw that it was Christine in her nurse's dress. She was holding his hand in both of hers and she was looking at him with eyes that made him get mixed up and think he was still in the hospital that other time when he had first found her again.

He looked at her sleepily. "Did you—leave that—son of a bitch?"

He saw tears running down her face and her mouth trembled. "Yes—but I've come back to him."

Alan slept once more, holding her hand, but not for long. He roused suddenly and this time he was wide-awake. He stared at Christine and tried to lift up in bed. "Chris!"

"What, darling?"

He gazed around and saw his white bed and the pitcher of water on the table beside it but still he didn't understand why he was in a hospital. It didn't seem very important, though. "I love you," he said.

Christine held his hand against her face. "I love you too. I love you for what you did last night. Don't you remember what you did?"

He thought hard, and then he remembered the Jap planes falling and the yellow road under his face. He felt embarrassed about it. "I got mad again," he said. "Borisov'll be sore as hell."

She laughed, with her white teeth showing. "Oh, Alan—oh, my darling. Oh, I wish I'd been there to see!"

His brain was working now, remembering more, and his face felt hot with the queer helpless shame. "And so that's why you've come back," he said. "Because you want a God-damned hero."

She shook his arm a little. "Oh, Alan—please. Please, please don't say things now. It isn't so, anyway. I'd already gone back. To the house. I went back home yesterday."

He was remembering everything now, and it seemed that what hurt most to remember was Father François' face. "Why'd you go back?"

"Because I found something out yesterday. For sure. Something I'd been afraid was true. I'd told myself I wouldn't let it happen—that I'd take something or do something, because we were too unhappy to—but when I found out it was true I was glad. Oh, I know it doesn't make sense——"

"What in hell are you talking about?" Alan said.

"We're going to have a baby."

For a long minute Alan stared at her. Then his heart leaped, and there was a strange feeling inside him.

"I want a little girl," he said in a voice that sounded very funny to him.

"I do too. That's what we'll have."

"A little blonde girl with your hair and nose and eyes and mouth."

"I'll try awfully hard, darling."

"We'll dress her in white dresses with a pink sash and two pink bows in her hair."

But in his heart he knew that he lied, and that he wanted a boy. He wanted a son whom he could teach to fly.

He tried to reach Christine, but he couldn't lift himself. "Come here," he said.

She put her arm under his head very carefully and kissed his mouth.

"We'll be all right now, Chris," he told her.

"We'll be beautiful." She laid her cheek against his.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

HE WAS sitting in a wheel chair by his window when Christine came hurrying in with her gray eyes shining with excitement. "Quick, fix your bathrobe properly. You've got company. Very special company!"

"Who?"

"Someone you like. Someone important." She fastened his bathrobe with quick fingers and ran a comb through his hair while he laughed and tried to shove her away.

"Damn it, I look all right for that big vodka-soaked ox——"

He stopped then, because he saw the Generalissimo standing laughing at him in the doorway.

Alan tried to get out of his wheel chair. "I thought it was Borisov," he said, laughing too and turning red.

Chiang came forward and pressed him gently down into his chair. "Please sit still. Please obey your nurse always and get well. I cannot have you long out of action."

Christine pulled the other chair close to Alan for Chiang and slipped out of the room. The Generalis-

simo sat down. His face looked strained, Alan saw, but his eyes were bright and keen and his smile was a ready one.

"Thank you for coming," Alan said.

"I like better the first greeting you gave me," Chiang told him. "I am flattered that you thought me Borisov. He is a great general. He is doing the things that I wish those Germans had done. China is not winning yet, but she is closer to the time when she will begin to win. Our tactics are now the right ones. And we are getting more and more arms."

Alan was leaning forward in his chair. "Tell me what our troops are doing now."

Chiang leaned forward too, and told of Borisov's latest stratagem that had blasted two thousand Japs. Chiang talked on, but he did not mention the Rangoon road. At last he rose. He shook hands with Alan and then he put one hand into his pocket. "I have brought a small present for you," he said. "Perhaps sometimes, on occasions of state, you will wear it, and remember with friendship the China that is very grateful to you."

He pinned something on the lapel of Alan's bathrobe. "Now good-by," he said, saluting lightly. "And do not forget to obey your nurse."

He went out, and Alan sat listening to his firm step down the hall.

Then Alan looked down at what was pinned to his bathrobe and he lifted it with his thumb and finger and looked at it in a sort of entranced wonderment. When he saw a tear drop on it he was horrified. He said angrily, "Jesus Christ!" and yanked the small object off his lapel and stuffed it guiltily into his pocket.

Christine came in as he did it. Her eyes were still shining. "What is it?" she half whispered.

"It's not a God-damned thing," Alan said. "Get out of here."

She looked at his flaming face and she came to him and with a quick movement thrust her hand into his bathrobe pocket. His fingers grabbed her wrist and hurt her, but she jumped away with her fist closed tightly and then opened her hand and stood looking at what lay on it.

"Oh, Alan!"

"Oh for Christ's sake," Alan said, "of all the rot—I take my plane and do a damned fool thing because I was mad at you and hoped I'd crack up so you'd be sorry, and now everybody tries to make a hero-for-China out of me. I didn't do it for China and I don't

want any damned gewgaw for my chest. Give it back to China for scrap metal."

Christine stood with the medal in her hand and her eyes looked as if he had hit her. She stood as if she were uncertain what to do with the medal. Then she dropped it on the bed and went out quickly.

Alan hid the medal in a sock in his duffel bag and Christine didn't ask about it. They kissed after that as if nothing had happened. A week later Alan was discharged from the hospital and they went back together to the little house, and that first night at home drove their memories about the medal away.

But afterward Alan thought of the thing he had said in the hospital and he was ashamed of it, and because he was ashamed he loved Christine more than he had ever loved her before.

The old resentments were in him when he had to stay alone all day, thinking how soon he would be back flying and unable to come home. But he didn't say anything about that. Somehow, though, in a curious way, the saying nothing was worse than his angry arguing had been the other time.

When they lay in bed together and planned about the baby, happiness and peace would come back. They meant to marry as soon as they could, but Father

François was away from Chungking, working among Borisov's wounded soldiers. Alan thought they should go to someone else. But Christine still wanted to wait.

"I wouldn't feel married if anyone else did it," she said.

They lay awake in the big canopied bed sometimes until dawn came in the window, and it seemed at such times as if they could never possibly have tried to leave each other.

But Christine grew very nervous and tired, although her morning sickness had passed.

She started crying one morning when she should have gone to sleep hours before. "*Make* me go to sleep—please," she begged Alan. "Go away—don't kiss me any more. I can't bear to leave you, but I've *got* to sleep or I'll never get up."

"Don't," Alan said, kissing her. "Don't get up."

It was the first time he had said that. She tried to laugh a little.

"Stay home just tomorrow," Alan said.

"You know I can't."

"Please, Chris."

"Oh, Alan, *don't*."

"I'm sorry." He kissed her again, but the kiss had no happiness in it. "Good night."

"Good night," she said.

She didn't sleep, he knew. She lay still and he listened for her breathing to become the breathing of sleep. He stayed awake, listening, and he knew that she stayed awake too. In the morning when he awoke a big sunbeam was spread across the bed and she was still there, with her alarm clock run down beside her sleep-deafened ear.

When he stirred she woke. She sat up quickly and stared at the sunshine and at the clock and then she gasped and sprang from the bed. She looked at Alan just once as she grabbed up her clothes, and the memory of her eyes stayed with him all the rest of the day. One of his Chinese fliers died in the hospital that morning. Christine didn't tell him about it until he came to the hospital the day after that to see his friend. She met him in the hall, knowing where he was going, and she said, "Yin died yesterday morning."

"Died?" he said stupidly.

"We were shorthanded yesterday morning," she said.

The memory of her eyes at that moment stayed with him again. And somehow her not having told him until then was a thing that lay between them in bed after that, instead of happiness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

SHE gave up going to the hospital when she grew large, but she still worked at home, preparing bandages and dressings alone.

The rains came and made the yellow-dirt road a river of mud. The arms couldn't move over it but the Japs kept trying to smash the road and the bridges. There was still little rest for Chiang's fliers and Alan was not home much more than he was before.

When he came he slept stretched across the bed in his muddy clothes while Christine went on making her bandages and her baby dresses and then crept into bed quietly so as not to disturb his sleep.

The night she had lain waiting for sleep and had felt the baby first try his forming limbs she had awakened Alan. "Alan! Alan! He moved!"

He had understood her finally and had put his arm around her heavily, still drugged with his exhaustion, and had drawn her to him with his face against her body. Something had fluttered and pressed against his cheek and he had lain there awed and still, feeling the strangest sort of joy he had ever known. He

had almost forgotten that Christine was there until he heard her half-whispering voice saying a queer thing.

"He's a part of the world now."

Her hand touched Alan's hair, trembling and holding him to her. And she said, "The world will be a good world for him. He won't have to fight. His fighting will have been done for him—long before."

"He isn't a Chink," Alan said, because for a moment her words seemed to swell the strange feeling of joy tighter in his chest, and he was ashamed of that.

Christine didn't say anything more. When her hand eased and lay more lightly on his hair he thought she had gone back to sleep. He didn't sleep again himself. He lay thinking about his son and seeing the guns of the Jap bombers always blasting the P-40's, and finally he got up and put on his dirty boots and went back to the field through the mud and rain of day-break, although he still had three hours coming to him for rest.

The rains stopped at last and the arms trucks moved again, their caravans longer, the thunder of their engines shaking the bridges that still stood strong to receive them.

But the Japanese armies felt the weight of the guns and planes that were flowing to Borisov's guerillas,

and still greater hordes of Jap planes came, spared from the front, to try to cut off the movement of the arms.

New fliers kept coming in, Americans and Russians, and steadily the Chinese student fliers won their wings, but there were never enough pilots now to replace those who died.

Alan grew thin and he felt angry with discouragement as his men fell. It was almost too bitter a thing to bear that there were more planes now than there were men to fly them. The Japs got through to the field and blasted the planes sitting empty in the hangars. They were striking the town also, and while he flew Alan suffered with his fear for Christine. He worried too because it was almost time for the baby to be born and still Christine would wait only for Father François.

It was on Alan's day to rest that Borisov came. Alan awoke to find the giant Russian, bearded now and gaunt in a battle-marked dusty uniform, shaking him.

"Ho, now," Borisov was roaring, "get up and stop loafing! How can I win this war for Chiang with you sleeping night and day?"

He picked Alan up then and hugged him in his great arms. "My God, you are thin—you are weak—why,

you are nearly dead. What have they been doing to you, you midget, you?"

Alan pounded him and laughed and shoved him away. "I'm good for a while longer, you bearded goat. If you'd stop chasing women and tend to your business of keeping the Jap bombers busy, I'd be able to get a rest."

Christine came in with a bottle and two glasses. "We've been saving this for you," she told Borisov.

He swung on his heel and the great sword strapped at his waist thudded against his legs. He seized the bottle and kissed it. "Vodka! Vodka! I have not seen any for months." He filled the two glasses and raised his drink impatiently to Alan. "In politeness to a lady I shall try to drink like a gentleman. But damn it, hurry up!"

Alan drank and Borisov emptied his glass and re-filled it. "That one was only to my thirst," the Russian said. "But this one is to your wife and to the new happiness which I see is coming."

"We're not married yet," Christine smiled.

Borisov scowled fiercely at both of them. "And why are you not?"

"She's waiting for Father François," Alan explained. "She thinks nobody else could do it right.

I wish to God you'd tell her it's time to take a chance on somebody else."

Borisov splashed himself another drink. "This one is to today, your wedding day," he told them. "Father François is now in Chungking with my wounded men, and we will all go to him today. I will be best man—as I am anyway. Ho, I am going to enjoy this midget wedding."

Alan walked to Christine and put his arm around her. Fatigue was still in his aching muscles but he felt an excited eagerness. "Come on, get ready."

Her gray eyes met his. "I'm ready now."

Borisov had downed his drink and was pouring another for himself and one for Alan. "And now this one is for my news." But he didn't drink. He set his glass down and went to Alan and put his large hand on Alan's shoulder. "You have finished your job," he said. "You have earned a good country's thanks and at last a proper rest. Four hundred million people love you. That would be enough love to last even me for the rest of my life. When Chiang speaks of you there is the love of all those people in his voice. I hope he speaks to you the same of me. He had better. I am not stupid like you; I *know* that I am good. So you have done your job, you have held the fort until re-

inforcements could come. And now a great thing has happened for China. The American Army has sent its fliers to protect the Burma road. They have detached these fliers for service here and an American colonel will command them. They will be called volunteers but they will still be paid by their army at home. It is a subterfuge, but somebody back there has brains enough to know that this war is America's war too, and so these American Army fliers are now on their way up from Rangoon today."

Alan stood with his glass half lifted. He stood with it held that way as if his arm were paralyzed. He stayed still and looked at Borisov and at first there was only a stunned feeling in him, and then for a moment he thought, with hardly any feeling at all, Well, thank God, I can sleep. But then an anger started stirring in him, an incredulous anger that rose slowly and swelled in his chest and made his face darken and his jaw muscles go hard, and he thought, God damn it, it's *my* job.

He heard himself saying that aloud then, and out of the corner of his eye he saw the proud glad look on Christine's face change to uncertainty and he saw her standing very still. Borisov came closer to him as he stepped backward, but Alan backed away and let his

arm come down, throwing his drink from the glass to splash across the wall. There was a new feeling in him now, the feeling that he wanted to cry. But his voice grew angrier and louder instead.

"It's my job!" he said. "I worked and sweated, and yes, by God, bled, and now they give it to somebody else!"

"We have money saved," Christine said in a low dull voice.

"But you will still have a job!" Borisov told him. "You will fly with these Americans. All your fliers will join with them, and Chiang hopes you will do the same. You will be second in command but your work will be easier. It is all for the same cause—there is no difference except a foolish title——"

"To hell with your God-damned cause," Alan said.

He walked to a window and stood looking out, with his back to them. He stood there a long time and heard no sound behind him except Borisov's sword thumping his boots softly and then the vodka bottle clinking lightly against a glass.

At last Alan turned around. "Well, come on, let's get going."

He looked at Christine. She looked back at him without any expression.

She said tonelessly, "Yes—come on."

She got her coat and they all went out to Borisov's car and all three sat in the front seat and rode silently out of Kunming toward the climbing sun.

Soon they overtook big camouflaged trucks carrying arms to Chungking. Alan looked at them and felt his heart tighten with a still stranger anger that was like grief. They're mine, he thought. And then he thought quickly, disgusted and angry at himself, Oh, for God's sake.

They drove fast and passed more of the arms trucks, but still they did not talk. There was little else on the road. Beside him Alan could see Christine's white face and he knew the hurt that was in her heart. He wanted to lower his arm behind her and pull her close to him and press his face into her blowing hair with its sweet clean smell. But he kept his arm stiff along the back of the seat. Hell, he thought, I can't help being what I am. Why can't she take me that way?

The sun rose high and started downward and finally they stopped and ate lunch. Christine ate only a little, and now Borisov was laughing and joking again, trying to make their wedding party a happy one.

"You must eat for two," he told her sternly. "Did the doctors not tell you that?" He shoveled down

large forkfuls of an enormous steak. "I eat for two always, and both are gluttons. It is a great responsibility, but I do not shirk."

Alan tried to help now too. "You drink for four," he said.

Borisov nodded in agreement. "And all are drunkards."

Christine smiled a pale smile and Alan's heart contracted as he saw it. He wanted to reach for her hand under the table. I know I'm a son of a bitch, he wanted to say, and not the kind of guy you want, but please go on loving me.

They got back in the car and Borisov drove fast, still trying hard to think of jokes to make Christine smile. The sun had disappeared and dusk was gathering as they drew near to Chungking, and then all at once they heard the drone of big motors coming toward them, and before they could speak of what they heard they saw a wave of Japanese bombers racing down from the clouds.

Borisov jerked the car to the side of the road. "Out!" he shouted. "Lie flat!"

Alan sprang out, pulling Christine. But before they could drop to the road a bomb screamed down at them and hit the road where they had just passed. . . .

Alan felt himself coming back out of darkness. He struggled, and dirt and stones showered from him as his arms thrashed. Blood was running into his eye. He stood up, tottering, wiped his face and stared around wildly. Borisov and Christine were in the roadside ditch, covered with dirt.

He ran to them, dug at the dirt and pulled their arms. Borisov's shoulder was bleeding where his coat had been torn away. Christine lay half under the Russian's great body, but there was no blood on her. Borisov staggered up as Christine's eyes opened; she stirred and cried out, and moved again in a strange way, tensing and shuddering.

Borisov seized her arm and pulled her with Alan. "Is she hurt? Is she hurt?"

Christine struggled against their pulling, and she groaned. She tried to speak then. "I'm—all—right. But it's the—the——"

"My God!" Alan yelled. "It's the baby!"

"Mother of Christ!" Borisov said.

"Hurry up—get her into the car——"

But they saw then that the car was only flat wreckage on the road.

"Oh, Jesus," Alan said. He stood holding Christine. He begged her, "Chris! Chris! Are you all right?"

"Yes——" she panted. Then she saw the blood on his face, and she cried out again. "Oh! You're hurt——"

"That's not a damned thing," Alan said.

Borisov was staring down the road. One of the last trio of arms trucks that they had passed was coming. Borisov strode back to Christine and took her hand. "Are your pains bad? Have they stopped now?"

She smiled at him a little. "Yes—no. Yes, they've stopped—and no, it wasn't very bad. I can stand lots worse."

"I think then there is plenty of time," the Russian said. "You will not embarrass us in public. This truck will take you to the hospital. Don't be afraid."

"I'm not." But she held tightly to Alan.

The truck roared up to them and Borisov flagged it. It stopped, crunching on the pieces that were left of the car. But there was no room in its seat beside the driver. The seat was heaped with loose rifles and boxes. Two other Chinese soldiers rode on the running board. Borisov spoke for a moment with the driver and then came back to Christine and Alan.

"You will go," he told Alan. "Ride on the running board and bring back a doctor with a car—an ambulance if you can. I will take care of Christine. We

will try to get a ride in to Chungking, so watch the road as you return. But if we get no ride and you are too late, then I will be the doctor. I have brought babies many times. But I think the baby will not come for hours. You see she has no more pain, and that one was not bad."

Alan kissed Christine's pale lips and gave her to Borisov and jumped on the truck's running board with the two soldiers. Part of the driver's cab was shot away and machine-gun bullets had struck the canopy and sides. The truck started and Alan waved. Christine and Borisov waved back to him. He kept looking back and saw Borisov lead Christine onto the grass at the roadside and unstrap his big sword and spread his coat on the grass but he would not let her sit down. They were walking together on the grass, Christine tiny beside the Russian, when the thickening dusk closed around them. The truck sped on.

Alan hung on with one arm and held his handkerchief to the cut over his eye.

"Missy hurt?" one of the young soldiers asked him.

"Little bit," Alan answered.

"Too bad."

The other soldier said, "Goddamn Jap plane hurt two truck, kill all driver."

The other grinned. "We save guns. Got 'em on here."

"Good," Alan said.

Then he heard the bombers coming back. He looked around and strained to see them, and then saw the dim shapes of them, flying low, three of them above the road. They passed over with a roar, and bullets spattered against the truck's canopy and another corner of the cab broke open to the sky.

The young soldiers hung on and ducked and Alan did too. No one was hurt. The soldiers cursed the planes and Alan strained his eyes back toward Christine and Borisov but could see nothing but the night.

The truck rolled on and entered Chungking. Alan jumped off and ran down a street to the military hospital. Ambulances were lined up in front of it and wounded men were being carried in. Alan went past them inside the hospital where the wounded men were laid in the corridors and the doctors and nurses were working among them. He saw Father François bending over an unconscious soldier, staunching the blood that flowed from the man's chest. The Jesuit looked up and saw Alan trying to get to him, and his taut face lighted briefly. Alan stepped over the men on the

floor and reached him. Father François' hands kept working as he greeted Alan gravely.

"I would hope you had brought Christine to me if it were not such a time as this."

"She's out on the road," Alan told him. "She's having the baby out there. The Japs blew us in a ditch and smashed our car. For God's sake, get a doctor and come with me. We ought to be married before the baby comes."

Father François' hands nearly faltered. "She is alone?"

"No, Borisov's with her."

"Then I thank God for that, but it is still terrible that this should happen. My son, every doctor in Chungking is in the hospitals and none of them will leave these soldiers." He was silent, applying adhesive tape to a compress. Then he stood up. "Come, I will go with you and do the small thing that I can do. But you must trust to Borisov for the rest. We will take her to some private house. Even if we brought her here—" he gestured—"you can see——"

"Then come on."

Alan clutched at the priest's sleeve and they picked their way in haste around the wounded men. A doc-

tor's car was in front of the hospital. Father François walked quickly to it and felt the ignition switch.

"The key is here. They will not need this car. They need only the ambulances."

He slid past the wheel and Alan got in. The ignition was unlocked. Alan shot the car forward and drove fast without lights through the darkened city and out along the road beyond.

"Was she in hard labor?" the priest asked.

"No, she'd just begun. Borisov said there'd be plenty of time, and he knows."

Father François nodded. "With the first child, the labor is nearly always protracted. Even though a shock has brought it on."

They did not talk any more. The moon appeared above a cluster of trees and lighted the road. Alan watched the roadside and finally saw Borisov's giant figure. He swung the car over and stopped it and leaped out, and now he was trembling violently. His eyes strained past Borisov, and on the grass he saw Christine lying, covered with Borisov's coat, but he could not see her face. He tried to get past Borisov, but the Russian's hand closed tightly around his arm.

"She is dead," Borisov said.

Alan stood trembling, and Borisov told him, "The bombers came back, just as you had left. They turned their guns on us. A bullet hit her forehead and at once she was dead. She had no knowledge of death and no pain."

Alan stood looking past Borisov at the great coat spread on the ground. The darkness dimmed it, but in the moonlight he could see that Christine lay on half of it and that its other half was folded over her. He stood staring, and suddenly he cried out, "Chris! Chris!" and tried to fight Borisov to go past him.

"Stop," the Russian said. "Stop. I have something here that I want you to see. Will you look at this that I have? It is something for you."

He thrust something out, shielding it with his arm, barring Alan's way. Alan saw dazedly that it was a bundle made of Borisov's short uniform coat, and he realized dully that the Russian had been holding it in one arm all the while.

He stared at it, trembling still, and Borisov's big hand pulled a corner of the coat aside, and Alan saw that the bundle had a face, the smallest face he had ever seen. But he was too dazed to understand.

"What is it?"

"It is your son."

Father François was at Alan's side, looking down at the tiny face.

"Is—is he dead too?" Alan whispered.

"No. He is very much alive."

Father François was gazing at Borisov unbelievably. "She was killed when Alan had just left?"

"Yes," Borisov said.

"And her labor was—just begun?"

The Russian did not answer.

Father François asked him softly, "Have you performed a miracle?"

"No. In Russia they taught me to do many things. But no miracles."

Alan scarcely heard. He was looking past Borisov and past his son, and again he cried, "Chris——" and tried to go to her, but Borisov held him strongly.

"Please do not look at her now," he said with great earnestness.

Tears were running wildly down Alan's cheeks.

"Wait——" Borisov said. "You may see her face."

He strode ahead. His sword in its heavy scabbard bumped against his legs. Still holding the baby, he knelt beside Christine for a few moments, and then stepped back and touched Alan's arm. Alan knelt and looked at Christine's white face in the moonlight.

There was no blood on the wound. Her hair was over her forehead, the way it had often fallen, tousled, when he had loved her in the canopied bed, and Borisov's coat was pulled down, tucked tightly over her breasts, but her breasts were high and full under it, swollen with milk for her baby. Her lips were parted and her eyes were open a little bit, and except for her very white face she looked to Alan the way she had looked when she was sleepy but loved him and didn't want to go to sleep.

He leaned and kissed her lips, and for a moment he had expected to find them warm and to feel her arms come up around his neck. But they were not warm, and he got to his feet and put his arm over his eyes and started sobbing, and Borisov's hard arm went around him and led him back toward the road.

Behind him he heard Father François talking to Christine, and then he knew that the old priest whom she had wanted to marry her was saying a prayer for the dead. Finally he realized that Borisov was talking to him, shaking his arm gently and trying to put the coat bundle into his arms.

"Hold him," Borisov said fiercely. "You are his father. Again you are loafing and not performing your duty."

Alan lifted his arms limply and the Russian gave him the bundle, making sure that Alan was holding it before he let it go. Suddenly a queer mewling sound came out of it and startled Alan. But Borisov chuckled.

"He is hungry. Mother of Christ, it is too bad that my abilities must end somewhere."

"Will he be all right?" Alan asked fearfully.

"Yes, he will be all right. He is a strong one. He will not be a midget like you." Borisov peered too into the tiny twisting face. "Poor little boy," he said softly. "Yes, we will try to make a good world for you."

Alan stood still and his arms tightened until he was holding his son clasped hard against his chest. The little face twisted and cried, and Alan saw his tears drop on it, but inside him was a great swelling emotion.

The sound of planes came suddenly and he clutched the baby in terror. But they came from Kunming and they swept fast across the moonlit clouds, staying high, and Alan saw that they were P-40's, spoiling to fight, out hunting Japs this far from home. It was the new Americans in them, he knew, because his own orders, when he had been boss, had never sent his planes this

far when no Japs were challenging. These were the men who had taken his job. And suddenly his lungs felt as if they were bursting. He held his son in his arms and watched the P-40's streak past the moon.

Go get 'em! he yelled to them in his thoughts. Go get 'em! I'll be with you tomorrow!

THE END

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